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ISSUE 06
NOVEMBER 2021
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SAINTS ROW

Is back to basics the right choice for Volition's sandbox series reboot?

MARVEL MIDNIGHT SUNS

XCOM's developer explores Marvel's darker side

→FIRST DETAILS

DOKEV

Is this super-cute RPG the best-looking PS5 game yet?

HOW UNREAL ENGINE 5 IS SUPERCHARGING PLAYSTATION 5

HANDS-ON: HAS FAR CRY 6 BEEN WORTH THE WAIT?

WHY WE CAN'T WAIT TO RETURN TO GTA: VICE CITY

→HUGE REVIEW

DEATHLOOP

Why Arkane's time-looping shooter is this year's PS5 must-play!

→ MAKING HISTORY

CALL OF DUTY: VANGUARD RISES

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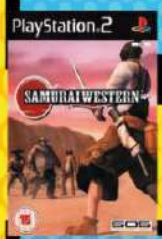

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Welcome

As we're only six issues into PLAY, we know a thing or two about fresh starts. This issue seems to be all about them, from original games to reboots to existing ones and new approaches to long-running series. It matches the newness of PlayStation 5 itself, still in its first year. This is a great time to look to the future.

Saints Row, with its clean title and back-to-basics approach (p54) is the centrepiece of this issue. We dive into why now was the time to bring it back as we speak with Volition about the undertaking, and dissect the gameplay we've been shown behind closed doors. It might nix superpowers and the supernatural, but it's the same zany crime series we grew to love as we played Saints Row 2 and 3.

Away from the crime-ridden streets of Santo Ileso, we step into the world of DokeV (p64), a charming open world from South Korean developer Pearl Abyss. Ahead of its fresh reveal, we had the chance to speak with the team about their vibrant new take on monster collecting.

And while Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines 2 has slipped into the dark, we turn our attention to VTM – Swansong. From Big Bad Wolf, the developer of the underrated The Council, this is a unique, deep narrative RPG take on the World Of Darkness tabletop RPG. This is the Vampire game to pay attention to. Similarly, while Square Enix continues to take its own approach, Firaxis has stepped into the Marvel ring with the surprising Marvel's Midnight Suns (p6). Blade teaming up with Iron Man and our own character? We're in.

Deathloop leads the charge in our reviews section (p72). Making quite the entrance, this is one of the most exciting launches we've had for some time, and it's a dream on PS5. If any game this year is a must-play, this could very well be it. There's plenty more freshness this issue, and we hope you enjoy reading!

> "DEATHLOOP IS ONE OF THE MOST EXCITING LAUNCHES WE'VE HAD IN SOME TIME."

Oscar Taylor-Kent
EDITOR
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GAME OF THE MONTH
Psychonauts 2
BEST CRIMES
Sly 2: Band Of Thieves

THIS MONTH'S SAINTS

Jeremy Peel
CONTRIBUTOR
Shredding his review every time he finished and making him start it again and again, we drove Jeremy loopy this month.

GAME OF THE MONTH
Deathloop
BEST CRIMES
Mafia: Definitive Edition

Jess Kinghorn
GAMES EDITOR
Her true colours turn out to be a sort of red as she sobs her way through the emotional game.

GAME OF THE MONTH
Life Is Strange: True Colors
BEST CRIMES
Yakuza Kiwami

Miriam McDonald
OPERATIONS EDITOR
Who needs DokeV's dokebi when you have cats? Though Mim's don't seem keen on donning boxing gloves after all.

GAME OF THE MONTH
Deathloop
BEST CRIMES
LA Noire

Milford Coppock
MANAGING ART EDITOR
Milf's started claiming he's a saint. There's no halo or choir in sight, instead he's booked a one way ticket to Santo Ileso.

GAME OF THE MONTH
Deathloop
BEST CRIMES
Hitman

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Insider

Getting you closer to PlayStation's most exciting stories, people, and culture

Better than any alarm clock on the market. Awakening you, The Hunter, is a last-resort move by the heroes.

"It's great to see the game exploring some of Marvel's darker themes."

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A new kind of superhero rises

XCOM dev Firaxis reveals its celebration of Marvel's dark side with Midnight Suns

Comic fans are huge nerds. Us included. When those comics are adapted, be it into movies, TV shows, or games, we crave that same level of passion. Firaxis is the team best known for revitalising XCOM, and you have to admire its Thunderballs for, upon being handed the keys to the Marvel Castle, deciding to make a game all about the semi-obscure '90s superhero team Midnight Sons (here revised as the less male-angsty Midnight *Suns*).

Our own Mim remembers the comics well (and still has many). The books were dark and edgy in theme, yet bright in colour in the classic Marvel style. In the comics the Midnight Sons, formed by two versions of Ghost Rider, and including Doctor Strange, Morbius, Blade, and more, were outcasts. Yet together, those hardened, supernatural heroes became a kind of found family.

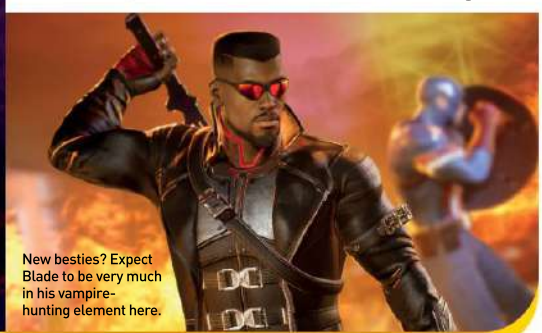
It's not an obvious choice, which you have to respect. Yet it makes perfect sense not just for the type of story Firaxis wants to tell, but the way the studio wants it to play, too. Nazi-adjacent organisation Hydra has revived the Mother Of Demons, Lilith, and in turn she seeks to revive her own evil master, Chthon. Such dark powers are beyond what the Avengers can deal with on their own, requiring them to join forces with the Midnight Suns. But even as the Avengers kit up in their Suns-approved emo gear, they need one more person. They need *you* - the legendary Hunter.

HUNTING SEASON

You are an ancient warrior, and the forsaken child of Lilith. Only by your hand was she defeated before. You're free to customise The Hunter so you feel like a genuine superhero, and you become the glue holding together these Midnight Suns of circumstance, leading the team through battles against demonic forces.

It's great to see the game exploring some of Marvel's darker themes. There's a rich archive of stories to explore that you don't often see in mainstream adaptations outside of the old Blade movies, and we're not sure the MCU will ever really dare to do them justice. We've had look at Iron Man, Captain America, Captain Marvel, Doctor Strange, Nico Minoru, Magik, Blade, Ghost Rider (Robbie Reyes), and Wolverine so far, though more will be joining the mix. We're confident that we'll see some other fan favourites that'll fit into the ranks snugly, which will make up a total 13-strong roster.

> **The Midnight Suns need one more person. They need you - the legendary Hunter.**



New besties? Expect Blade to be very much in his vampire-hunting element here.

Even the superhero designs here have a unique flair. The 'off-brand MCU' criticism (which you can't help making with regard to Marvel's Avengers and even Marvel's Guardians Of The Galaxy to an extent)

GIVE US MORB!
Morbius The Living Vampire hasn't been confirmed for this game. But with Sony making a Morbius movie starring Jared Leto as part of its Spider-Man Universe, if he doesn't show up here, could we see him swinging punches alongside Miles Morales?

doesn't apply here, even if Blade does look pleasingly like Wesley Snipes' movie interpretation. Perhaps that sense of style is down to the mix of heroes we've seen. Wolverine is there, in an outfit that's in part comics-accurate, with its own somewhat runic twist to fit the theme. It's a loving mashup of X-Men, Avengers, Runaways, and the Suns.

GETTING CARDED

As The Hunter, you need to learn from the heroes and make friends with them in order to get the most out of the team. That does mean chatting and hanging out, returning to a hub area in a way XCOM fans will be familiar with. But that said, this isn't simply an XCOM take on Marvel, though the developer is drawing on its knowledge of how to build a deep playable tactical RPG. It's still a Firaxis game, after all. Using a card-based system, you need to make sure the squad of heroes you take into battle is balanced, including both attackers and supporters (and each hero's role might not be what you'd expect).

Playing with the hand you're dealt, each turn you have the option to spend a card to use a move (be it dealing damage or buffing a team member), to reposition your heroes around either to get closer to enemies or to create distance, or to redraw cards you don't like. On top of that, you have a heroism meter, which essentially governs when you can bust out more powerful moves, like Blade's Stake, which dishes out over four times the damage of his Quick Strike (subject to tweaking, as the build we've seen is an early one).

Wait... cards, drawing, *numbers*? Yes. Midnight Suns is an RPG, but a fast-paced one. The sequences of moves The Hunter and their pals dole out feel like a quick brawl. The card system facilitates that, with your heroes making the most of their situation rather than mulling over options for minutes at a time. Combine that with your ability to build a deck of cards and a team of heroes that flow together well, and your team should be running like a well-oiled machine in no time. Tougher enemies require a little more punishment, but with the right co-ordination your superhero team can pack quite the punch. And yes, a mid-battle photo mode means you can celebrate the culmination of the perfect set of superhero moves all over social media (tag us!).

At a glance, it seems easier to get into than something like XCOM, as a superhero game should be. Yet the depth the cards add is already making our gears spin as we ponder how we can combine moves to build the perfect team. Beyond the comic-book scraps, though, we're just excited to build our own Hunter and hang out with the superheroes (purely platonic, though; Firaxis is adamant there's no romance). We love the characterisation we've seen so far, and can't wait to exist within the pages (though we're begging 2K to confirm Morbius, Marvel's no.1 tortured boyfriend, for some hangout seshs).

Beyond the comic-book scraps, we're just excited to build our own Hunter and hang out with the superheroes.

Your revival as The Hunter is due when the game launches in March 2022.

Firaxis is already making these heroes feel like its own. We can't wait to get to know them better.

1

2

3

4

5

1 Playing to Firaxis' XCOM roots, Midnight Suns is a tactical RPG, but with its own distinctive flavour. **2** The Hunter is highly customisable, and your personal representation in the world. By bonding with superfriends, they can become even more powerful. **3** A balanced team can support one another in battle. **4** Blade is just the coolest. 'Nuff said, really. **5** Lilith is up to no good. As the Mother Of Demons, she summons powerful Guardians on behalf of Hydra and her master. Best sort her out.

BUNCH OF RUFFIANS
Scottish studio Rockstar Dundee, formerly Ruffian Games, is rumoured to be leading the remasters. Before being bought by Rockstar it worked on Crackdown 2, Crackdown 3's multiplayer, and some porting on Halo: The Master Chief Collection.

Taylor-made news

Oscar Taylor-Kent's news slap

We love a good PS5 upgrade at PLAY Towers. An excuse to revisit old favourites made even better? Sign us up. And we're expecting **The Witcher 3: Complete Edition** to be a major one (especially as it's a free upgrade). Nail this version of the incredible RPG, and we'll be tossing coins to witchers left, right, and centre, even willing to forgive Cyberpunk 2077's launch debacle.

Speaking of tossing [*Er...* – Mim], the Complete Edition will include brand-new DLC "inspired by" the Henry Cavill-led Netflix Witcher series. We don't expect this to go as far as the PC mod that transplanted Cavill into the game itself, but we're eager to see what it actually entails. Most likely, it'll be a few items you'll be able to pick up that look like ones from the TV show. But we wouldn't turn our nose up at new quests, whether they're strictly canon or not. Geralt has to think about some things in the bath, right?

Grand paintjob

Remasters of GTA III, Vice City, and San Andreas are strongly rumoured

"Ah, [blorp!], here we go again." These GTAs are hugely influential and, more importantly, still fun.

As we await yet another version of GTA V (a game originally released in 2013 on PS3), this time on PS5, it's hard to remember how prolific the golden age of the series was on PS2. Not only did GTA III hijack the open-world genre in general, but follow-ups Vice City and San Andreas took that to an even higher level, all within three years. It's a trilogy worth remembering, and, as is strongly rumoured, worth remastering.

There's a host of reasons games can't be released at that rate any more. For starters, Rockstar is known for its games being cutting-edge. As games have become more detailed, production costs have risen and timelines lengthened. And cranking out three games built on the same foundation is no longer the done thing, especially when there's the constant drumbeat of GTA Online setting sales records in the background with every new update.

And yet, if you load up the PS4 ports of these gems, you'll find they're still great to play. Considering they are even playable on PS5 via backwards compatibility, the rumoured remasters will need to be more impressive than the existing ports. Which seems to be exactly the case, if the details floating around are to be believed.

According to the rumours, the remasters are being made in Unreal Engine, and will stay true to the original releases where possible, with a stop at the garage along the way for a fresh coat of paint. Expect new visuals that look like an updated version of the classic, blocky look, and a UI that's close to the originals. The mixture of classic style with a polished update should see the versions rising the criminal ranks to sit higher than the simple ported PS2 games already out.

CRIMINAL RECORD

Rockstar isn't known for properly remastering its older titles, so the project could set the standard for how the studio's back catalogue is treated in future (we're already polishing the saddles hoping for Red Dead Redemption to return).

From the sounds of it, the remasters will land at a similar time to the PS5 versions of GTA V and GTA Online, which are due on 11 Nov. With GTA III celebrating its 20th anniversary in October, it'd be an appropriate time. Despite the last mainline entry's wild success, GTA has been laying low for almost a whole generation, and so rumours or not, with a rap sheet like this it'll always jump up our most wanted list.

Which of the three would you dive into first? Tell us @PLAYgamingmag

An Unreal journey

Black Myth: Wukong shows off switch to Unreal Engine 5

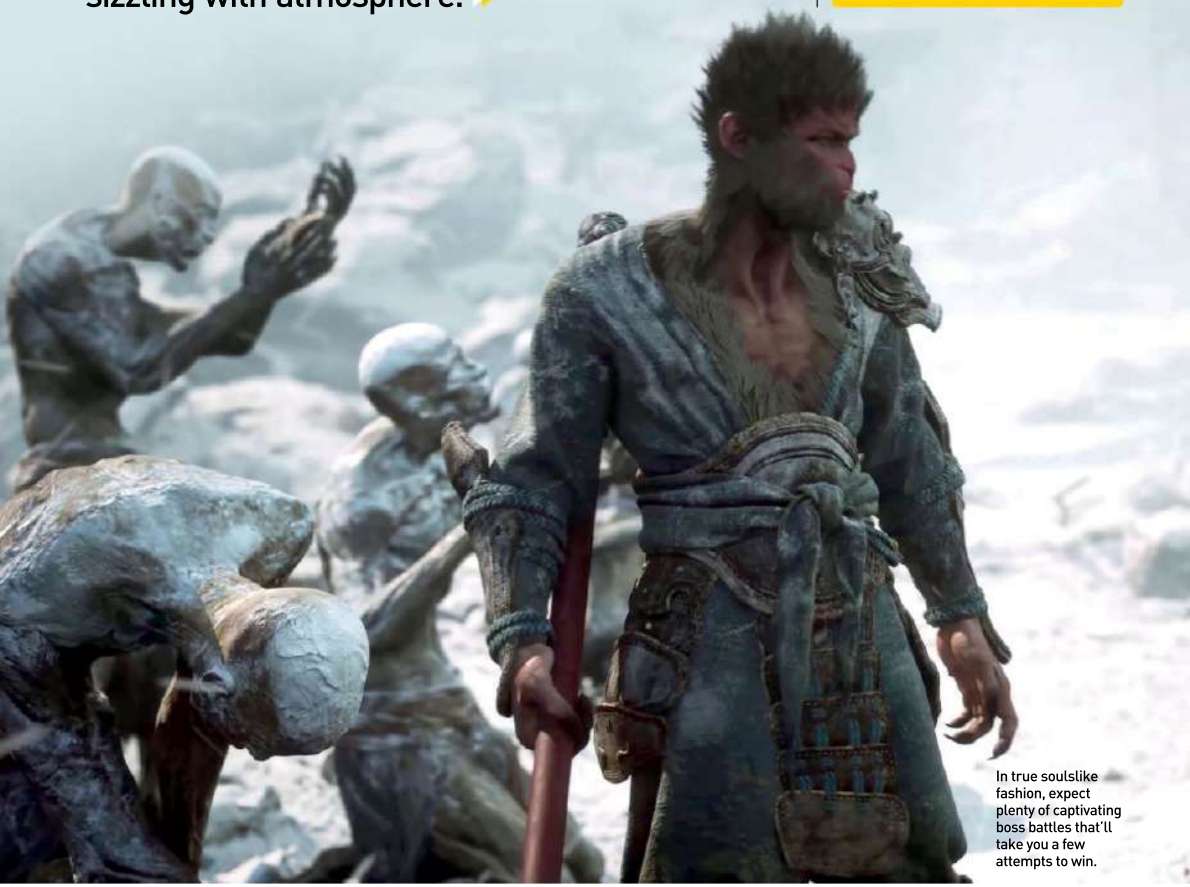
Already a looker when it was revealed last year, Black Myth: Wukong's latest gameplay showcase revealed an engine upgrade. Now running on Unreal Engine 5, the Journey-To-The-West-inspired soulslike looks amazing. Chinese developer Game Science really shows off what Epic's engine can do in a game.

In the showcase, Monkey makes his way towards a shrine through a mountain blizzard, fighting larger, angrier monkeys. As they scuffle, the snow deforms around the fighters, particles flying all over the place. There's a paciness to the combat that calls Sekiro to mind, but it's got a heft that's all Dark Souls. Slickly trading blows with his simian attackers, Monkey is able to leave after-images as he dodges, stretch his staff to poke opponents at just the right time to damage them, and even spin his staff around himself to create a temporary flaming shield on the ground (it lasts long enough for him to take a swig of a healing potion).

Things only get prettier on the surface of a frozen lake. As Monkey fights a Chinese thunder dragon under a beating sun, the bolts of lightning mix with the sun's rays to create a scene sizzling with atmosphere. As the dragon hurtles through the air, you really get the sense that it's blocking out the sun. Switching stances, Monkey can propel himself into the air to smack the dragon in the face, or perch on it to avoid ground-based lightning strikes. As beautiful as the engine upgrade looks, it's also impressive how much it's able to add to the action.

Under a beating sun, bolts of lightning mix with the sun's rays to create a scene sizzling with atmosphere.

Black Myth: Wukong won't be released until 2023 at the earliest.



In true soulslike fashion, expect plenty of captivating boss battles that'll take you a few attempts to win.

DEV ACCESS

A mystery in full bloom

White Paper Games cracks open the case on **Conway: Disappearance At Dahlia View**

Charlotte May is missing. The eight-year-old girl's disappearance engulfs Dahlia View and retired investigator Robert Conway can't leave the mystery unsolved. The ex-gumshoe quickly finds himself caught between two promises: one to Charlotte May's father, resolving to find the little girl, and one that becomes an even more personal family matter.

Robert's daughter Catherine is at the beginning of her law enforcement career and working the disappearance case in an official capacity. In many ways she is a foil to her father, particularly in her by-the-book approach. Knowing her father worked as a private investigator, she makes him promise not to get involved. Almost immediately, he betrays his daughter's trust. Regardless of how you tackle the central mystery, Robert will eventually have to face the consequences of breaking his promise.

The third game from White Paper Games fits neatly into the developer's hand-crafted 'Paperverse.' You don't need to have played 2015's Ether One or 2019's The Occupation before Conway but all three take place in the same universe. Set in 1950s England, Conway is the earliest entry in the timeline chronologically.

> **Spying on your neighbours is only one phase of Robert Conway's investigation.**

Audio-narrative director Nathaniel-Jorden Apostol tells us, "Dahlia View is a very small, contained world and we've gone with the idea that it's a metre wide and a mile deep."

The social fabric of Dahlia View presents a variety of threads to tug on, and allusions to other Paperverse games through artwork or family lineages serve to enrich that.

Apostol elaborates, "Worldbuilding is something that we absolutely love doing. Ether One was our first go at that and people praised us for the worldbuilding and the stories around the main story. When you've already built this entire world and then you move on to do a brand-new one, it kind of seems a shame to leave it."

Studio co-founder and game designer Pete Bottomley tells us, "We like the idea of creating new IPs, new game worlds to explore, and we want to keep pushing ourselves. Hopefully, people that have played Ether One to The Occupation to Conway, [will] see that evolution of a team growing."

GETTING AWAY WITH IT

The game draws inspiration from sources beyond the Paperverse. Robert's wheelchair use is lifted from Stephen King's Misery, and the cinematic stylings of The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo as well as Prisoners contributed to the game's vibe. The art style nods towards French animated film The Illusionist, and Bottomley says Hitchcock's Vertigo offered inspiration. The apartment view central to Conway's first reveal led many to draw a straight line to Rear Window as well.

Spying on your neighbours is only one phase of the investigation, and Robert doesn't wait for his suspects to come to him. After spotting something suspect from his apartment, Robert can investigate further by either breaking in and sneaking around or persuading a fellow resident to let him in or share information.

Apostol observes, "If you set a game now, the answer to everything is 'Google it [or] just phone them'. Forensics back [in the 1950s] was nothing compared to what it is now, so somebody could get away with a crime that no-one would have a chance to get away with now – somebody would have got their phone out and filmed it."

You'll then need to connect the dots in evidence review. There are plenty of optional threads to unspool, though you won't miss the case's core beats. "It's not necessarily possible to miss conclusions but it is possible to get towards the end of a level with a slightly different take on characters," Apostol says.

Catherine, Conway's daughter, makes him promise not to get involved in the case.

BLEAKER THAN FICTION

The team researched the '50s setting extensively but ultimately found looking into real-life crimes too bleak.

Apostol explains, "I actually don't think you need to use a real case for it to feel authentic. You just have to write a fear that is understandable by a lot of people."

Having become a father at the end of work on The Occupation, Apostol reflects, "[Working on Conway] you're thinking, 'Well, the sound needs to do this, and the art needs to do that,' and what have you [...] It's just all very functional. And then the second [...] it starts to take shape, and you start to view it like an actual father or like just an actual person playing the game, you go, 'Oh, God...' and suddenly, that thing that was really functional to you hits somewhere inside you."

Conway: Disappearance At Dahlia View will expand the Paperverse later this year.

1 Conway searches for clues. 2 Every suspect requires a different approach. 3 Of the Rear Window comparisons, Apostol says, "Just wait, because there's so much more so the game."

Nathaniel-Jorden Apostol tells us that Conway is "actually betraying his daughter's trust, that's where the story really lies."

FISHY BUSINESS
Managing director Ashley Cheng says he's always wanted to include fishing in Skyrim, adding, "It's a great addition to the game, it'll be free to everyone, and it really adds to the immersion."

PlayStation voices
The month in mouthing off

"IT WOULD'VE BEEN REALLY, REALLY COOL TO COLLAB." AMONG US COMMUNITY DIRECTOR VICTORIA TRAN IS POLITE ABOUT FORTNITE'S SUSPICIOUSLY FAMILIAR IMPOSTORS MODE.

"FIXED AN ISSUE THAT CAUSED THE EXECUTIONER'S REAR TO BE TOO FLAT." DEAD BY DAYLIGHT'S LATEST PATCH NOTES ADDRESS A MOST PRESSING ISSUE REGARDING PYRAMID HEAD.

"OUR INSPIRATIONS WERE OBVIOUSLY FOUND IN THE DEUS EX SERIES, BUT ANOTHER GAME THAT HAD A HUGE IMPACT ON US WAS OXENFREE." JEAN-FRANÇOIS DUGAS, SENIOR CREATIVE DIRECTOR ON MARVEL'S GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY, INTRIGUES US.

Skyrim returns (again) in style

Anniversary Edition heads to PS5

As we always suspected, Angel Thornberry proves herself a force to be reckoned with.

Ten years on from first taking the world – and eventually almost all of its devices – by storm, The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim is being rereleased yet again. Having debuted on 11 November 2011, Skyrim will celebrate its tenth birthday by coming to PS5 as The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim Anniversary Edition.

This rerelease bundles together the Dragonborn, Dawnguard, and Hearthfire expansions along with the improved base game seen in 2016's PS4 Special Edition. On top of that, the Anniversary Edition also includes 500 pieces of new Creation Club content. If you're not in the know, Creation Club is essentially a curated selection of community- and Bethesda-made mods. They include quests, spells, bosses, and much more.

RETURN AND REPLAY

Hardcore RPG fans may also be pleased to hear that this edition introduces a proper fishing mechanic. We suspect many players will relish the chance to finally get their pole out in Skyrim – their fishing pole, that is, as the sport is one of the new additions to what was already a massive, meaty game. At long last, gone are the days of wading through water and attempting to catch fish with the Dovahkiin's bare hands.

Innuendos aside, if you already own 2016's DLC-packed Special Edition, released for the game's fifth birthday, you'll be able to upgrade to the Anniversary Edition for an as-yet-unannounced price. While Anniversary Edition will be released for both PS4 and PS5, you won't need to buy it to play Skyrim on your new-gen console. If you're not fussed about Anniversary Edition's bells and whistles, you'll be able to play Skyrim on PS5 thanks to a free upgrade to be released at the same time.

With Bethesda having jumped ship for Xbox, it looks increasingly unlikely that The Elder Scrolls VI will hit PlayStation shores, so this could be a final hurrah for the fantasy RPG on the system.

*** Will you be playing Skyrim again or for the first time? Tweet us @PLAYgamingmag**

Upgrade your rides and thrillseeker visitors are sure to have a kraken good time.

The ride of your life

Tropico's devs 'impossify' theme parks in Park Beyond

Who among us hasn't gazed at a rollercoaster and thought 'I'd like to have a go at making my own?' It's something games have strived to deliver on, even back on PS1 with the likes of Theme Park World. But those older games had restrictions. Park Beyond pushes past those limits, asking what a theme park could look like unshackled from the confines of reality with the promise of 'impossification'.

It comes from Limbic Entertainment, the German developer behind Tropico 6, in partnership with Bandai Namco. The usual business sim elements are there, from balancing your pitches towards making money or building amazement (two of the currencies that help you develop your park) in the campaign mode to shrugging it off completely in sandbox mode. But each ride can be 'impossified' through multiple stages, giving classic rides new twists that just wouldn't be practical in real life. That includes an animatronic octopus that juggles carriages, a cannon that shoots rollercoaster carts between tracks, and a ferris wheel made of multiple smaller wheels stuck together.

It's neat to see how each one evolves, and the developers tease there are no limits (beyond money) to how wild your coasters can get. Though when working through challenges you'll need to rein it in now and then. With impossification, even a merry-go-round can get too intense for visitors, and will be tougher to maintain. Variety is the spice of life, but going for the impossible can be a good time too.

It includes an animatronic octopus that juggles carriages and a cannon that shoots rollercoaster carts.

Feel the impossification for yourself when Park Beyond rides onto PS5 in 2022.

GEAR: STUFF WE LOVE

PS5 beta user? Got it memorised?

WD BLACK SN850 1TB NVME M.2 PCIE 4.0 SSD

WESTERN DIGITAL £236.99 SHOP.WESTERNDIGITAL.COM

Mark Cerny has spoken. PS5's lead system architect revealed recently that this is the SSD that graces the expandable storage slot of his own console. The heatsink version may look bulky but fits within the 110x25x11.25mm space designated for expandable storage. Be sure to pick up a PCIe Gen 4 drive as Gen 3 drives aren't compatible with the console.

SEAGATE FIRECUDA 530 1TB NVME M.2 PCIE 4.0 SSD

SEAGATE £227.10 SEAGATE.CO.UK

While slightly easier to find without it, you really should get the model of this SSD that comes with a heatsink. That's not just because Sony itself recommends only NVMe M.2 SSDs that have one, but also because it's worth it for the sleek look and easier installation process. Boasting a read speed of 7300MB/s, this one's worth the dosh.

GIGABYTE AORUS 7000S 1TB NVME M.2 PCIE 4.0 SSD

GIGABYTE £232.98 GIGABYTE.COM

Gigabyte claims this SSD's copper heatsink makes it run 16% cooler, improving performance. It definitely makes a striking first impression, we'll give it that. You can pick up a 500GB, 1TB, or 2TB version of this SSD, all encased in that copper heat-spreader. The 500GB version is one of the most affordable SSD options we've seen that also includes a heat sink.

PATRIOT VIPER VP4300 1TB NVME M.2 PCIE 4.0 SSD

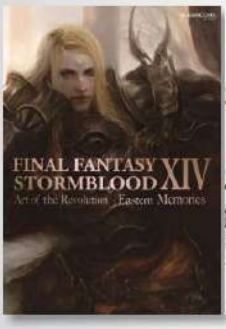
VIPER GAMING £168.96 VIPER.PATRIOTMEMORY.COM

This SSD's heat spreader doesn't encase it fully, so it is perhaps sleekest of the four internal drives we're featuring here. Comparatively cheaper than some other options, you can't go too far wrong with this one. That said, the trade-off for that price is that it's slower than anything else you can see on this page, with a read speed of 5000MB/s.

HEAT-THINK

If you're buying a PS5-compatible drive, be sure to check its dimensions with a heatsink, and make sure it'll fit in your PS5.

1



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3

At bookstores like Waterstones.com the best things come in pairs... or at least twos. For starters both volumes of [1] **Final Fantasy XIV: Stormblood The Art Of The Revolution** (£34.99 each) are getting reprinted. For, ahem, seconds, there's fighting delight to be found among the pages of [2] **Daigo The Beast: Umehara Fighting Gamers! Volume 2** (£17.99) and the hardback edition of [3] **Street Fighter Memorial Archive: Beyond The World** (£44.99). What a team up! Rounding out our artbook roster this month is [4] **The Art Of Overwatch Volume 2** (£34.99). You might think our 'two' theme is getting weaker with [5] **Cyberpunk 2077: Where's Johnny** (£16.99) but [6] **Fortnite Official: The Chronicle 2022** (£8.99) brings it home.

4

5

6

JESS'S REAL DEAL

Ever since Bugsnax launched, I've been honing my Bunger impression. *Bungerbungerbunger*... Unfortunately, all my practising means I'm no longer allowed to bust it out in mag team meetings. That leaves me with just this adorable plush to show off to.

Standing at six inches tall with a poseable wire frame (look at those little curly fry legs!), this design by artist Versiris is sure to be the perfect friend for amateur voice actresses and your Strabby plush alike. Fangamer demonstrates both soft toys' poseability in sweet little picnic photo shoots. That's all well and good, but we feel 3AM outside local club Moles might be a more believable habitat for our Bunger.

Coming soon to Fangamer.com. Sign up to its mailing list to be notified of availability.

THE BIG SHOT

Rising from the ashes

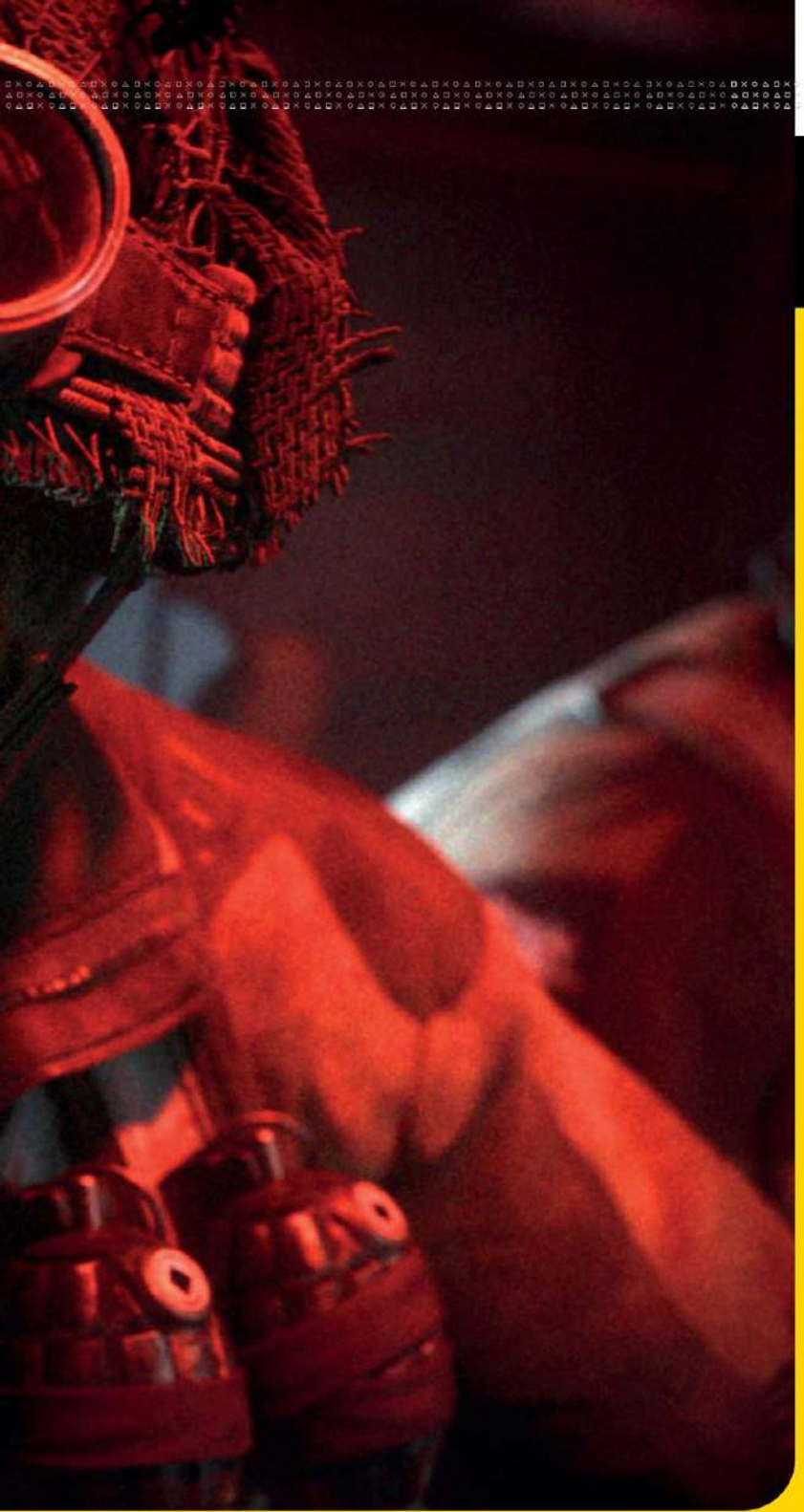
Call Of Duty: Vanguard ventures into historical fiction

The Call Of Duty series' baton-passing continues, with Sledgehammer taking point once again for a followup to 2017's Call Of Duty: WWII. Eschewing that entry's more linear narrative, Vanguard returns to the classic front-hopping style. Between the US Navy's Lieutenant Wade Jackson, the Red Army's Lieutenant Polina Petrova, and the British Army's Sergeant Arthur Kingsley and Private Lucas Riggs, you'll be fighting across both the Western and Eastern Fronts, as well as the Pacific and Africa.

The story teases high-stakes, edge-of-the-seat missions, with each character acting like proto-special forces operatives. They won't just participate in battles we know from history, they will also have to stop Project Phoenix, a post-WW2 Nazi operation to pass the mantle from Hitler to a successor, an almost Black-Ops-style slice of historical fiction that sounds tantalising.

It's great to see a meaty, fresh-feeling WW2 campaign is still a priority, even as live games continue to be a moneymaker – though there's plenty of support for that here too. Its own multiplayer features 20 maps at launch and a Gunfight mode evolution in Champion Hill; Treyarch is heading up a new Zombies mode; and Warzone will see a new map added, to tie in to Vanguard.

gamesradar.com/playmag



Numbers Game

We do the maths

04

Legs with the new Lady Maria Figma. She has an extra pair for sitting.

10,000,000

People have played Control, reports Remedy. As for a sequel, it's still in the "early conception phase".

10

Exclusive cosmetic items in the SMB Banana Mania launch edition.

2022

Goodbye Volcano High's new release date. The meteor's slowed down!

420,000,000

Knights and rising have been comically slain in Chivalry 2 so far. Get out there and get slashing.

40

Characters to play as in Genshin Impact now that Version 2.1 is here, finishing up Chapter 2's story.

DEBATE

What do you want from an upgraded PS Plus?

How should the subscription service evolve to take advantage of the way Sony is growing?

MIRIAM MCDONALD
OPERATIONS EDITOR

"JUST GIVE ME SOME MORE GAMES, OKAY?"

Call me basic, but I signed up for PS Plus for games. I've got other subscriptions taking care of things like film, music, and telly, and I'm not planning to end those. So what I'd really like from PS Plus is more games. *Revolutionary.*

Once you've been with PS Plus a while you do find you've built up a substantial library, so I've amassed a decent number during my time with the service, but rarely are they the little indies or quirky oldies that I'd really like to play. A few more smaller, older gems would be nice, in addition to the headline-grabbers and mass-market pleasers. ■

MILFORD COPPOCK
MANAGING ART EDITOR

"DEAR SONY, PLEASE JUST GIVE US THE PLAYSTATION EQUIVALENT OF XBOX'S GAMES PASS. *PRETTY PLEASE*?!"

Despite Sony's Jim Ryan stating last year that the the Xbox Game Pass model wouldn't work on PlayStation for financial reasons, it certainly seems to be doing pretty well for Microsoft. The thought of playing Horizon Forbidden West, Gran Turismo 7 or God Of War Ragnarok on PS5 on day one for a nominal price bump is a tantalising one. So Jim, are you still sure the financials wouldn't stack up? I'd argue there are 46.3 million existing PS Plus subscribers who might think otherwise. ■

It would be neat to get cheaper or earlier access to movies like Venom.

OSCAR TAYLOR-KENT
EDITOR

"SONY DOESN'T JUST MAKE GAMES. MAYBE PS PLUS SHOULD EMBRACE THAT?"

The big rumour currently doing the rounds is that a higher-tier PS Plus will incorporate newly acquired anime streaming services – Sony-owned Funimation bought out rival service Crunchyroll at the start of August. But why not go further than anime? If there's one thing Sony has, it's heaps of multimedia connections. It has its own film and television studios.

Buying videos on PlayStation Network never took off, but it would be neat to get cheaper or earlier access to movies like the new Venom or Ghostbusters, maybe not long after they've been in cinemas, considering the Sony link. I'd also love to get more in-game bonuses considering we're paying a fair bit for PS Plus, whether that's monthly or annually. Getting Aloy in Genshin Impact is a good start, but more free access to DLC or live games extras would be nice too. ■

JESSICA KINGHORN
GAMES EDITOR

"IT'S TOUGH ALWAYS BEING RIGHT – I IMAGINE."

Once upon a time in another incarnation of this magazine I wrote an opinion piece about how PS Plus sorely needs to level up by, say, merging with games streaming service PlayStation Now. (Let's face it, some users confuse the two anyhow.) I can't yet victoriously cackle "Ahaha, I was right!" from my soapbox but that reality creeps ever closer with each passing day.

The most recent story that makes me feel one step closer to vindication is the news that Sony snaffled up Crunchyroll over the summer, ushering in rumours of a potential premium Plus tier including the anime streaming service. It's not quite what I was going for – I'd thought of getting extra games – but, anime-liker that I am, I'll certainly take it! ■

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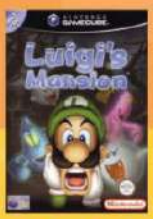

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IN THE MOOD FOR...

The law

These games dish out PlayStation justice – we're not judging

1 PHOENIX WRIGHT: ACE ATTORNEY TRILOGY
Capcom's classic visual novel trilogy follows Phoenix Wright's journey from rookie defence attorney to master of the courtroom. We've no OBJECTION! to how he squares off against fearsome prosecutors like Franziska von Karma and the coffee-obsessed Godot, and finds an unlikely ally in longtime rival Miles Edgeworth.

2 HARVEY BIRDMAN: ATTORNEY AT LAW
While Ace Attorney dragged his feet about coming to PS2 and PSP, heroic Harvey came to the rescue in this game based on Adult Swim's animated series and made in collaboration with the show's writers and voice actors.

3 JUDGMENT
Disgraced defence lawyer Takayuki Yagami runs a detective agency taking gutter-level cases like defending yakuza lowlife or getting photos of illicit affairs. Nonetheless, he still keeps in contact with his former colleagues at Genda Law Office. Maybe that lawyer's badge could lose its tarnish.

4 PERSONA 5
The Phantom Thieves may represent true justice, but they're still criminals to adult society, ending up in in the sights of public prosecutor Sae Nijima (Phantom Thief Makoto's older sister and legal guardian). She develops an obsession with catching them at all costs, and adding to Japan's dubiously high 99% conviction rate.

5 MARVEL VS CAPCOM 3
She-Hulk is also Jennifer Walters, a lawyer who defends the rights of the downtrodden, and has brains to go with her brawn when transformed. Of course, in Capcom's 3 Vs 3 smash-up, She-Hulk is simply all about dishing out street justice. If she's on the attack, you need a good defence.

6 HITMAN
For every criminal mastermind, there's an unscrupulous lawyer. Take Ken Morgan, who got spoilt rockstar Jordan Cross acquitted of murdering his girlfriend. Of course, Morgan isn't the first crooked lawyer in need of a contract. In cases like this, better call Agent 47.

7 GENSHIN IMPACT
The prosperous nation of Liyue places a lot of importance on contracts, so it makes sense that it also values legal advisors capable of writing a water-tight contract. Yanfei is one of the region's most popular, but you'll really want her on your team for her powerful pyro-based magic. There's your inadmissible evidence!

8 JUDGE DREDD: DREDD VS DEATH
What does a first-person shooter have to do with the law? Well, as 2000 AD's iconic enforcer says, "I AM THE LAW!" Who are we to argue?

9 GRAND THEFT AUTO IV
In the amoral world of Liberty City, it could be argued corrupt lawyers are in bed with members of law enforcement and gangsters. It's fitting, then, that Niko can date Kiki Jenkins of law firm Goldberg, Ligner & Shyster.

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

The Sims 4
With the Discover University expansion, your Sim can embark on a law career either as a judge or private attorney.

LA Noire
You may be an LAPD detective but interrogations where you must detect the lie from someone's facial expression are still a thrill.

Final Fantasy XII
As its judges are more military commanders and executioners, the Archadian Empire's criminal justice system is lacking, to say the least.

Did we miss a legal eagle? Got a brilliant In The Mood For idea? Show and tell at **twitter.com/PLAYgamingmag**

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Duking it out as Leon, Chris and Claire sounds like fun.

OPINION

"WHY NOT BUILD UPON THE EXISTING FOUNDATIONS LAID WITH RESISTANCE?"

Multiplayer in Resident Evil may work, but RE:Verse ain't it

WRITER BIO
Undercooked multiplayer makes Aaron Potter groan like a zombie. Resident Evil should and can do much better.

We can all agree that Capcom has (mostly) knocked it out of the park with its handling of Resident Evil of late. Sure, it's fair to argue that the recent remake of Resi 3 was somewhat lacking owing to its short length and content cut from the original game, but the stellar pacing and presentation of Resi VII, Resi 2 Remake, and now Village have successfully revitalised the classic survival horror series for a new generation of players. Coming face-to-face with a horde of flesheaters suddenly feels scary again!

Perhaps scariest of all, however, is Capcom's insistence on infusing the classic series with some form of multiplayer. It's a baffling route to want to go down, seeing as horror games are almost always at their best when played alone. That said, Capcom has had some minor wins with Resident Evil multiplayer in the past. And I can only assume its dedication to making something like Resident Evil: Resistance or RE:Verse work is because there's more to do with this concept of social scares.

Resident Evil: Resistance – released in tandem with the Resident Evil 3 remake last year – had a lot of promise. It was built as an asymmetrical survival game in which four civilian characters must foil a mastermind's plans and traps, and trying to complete a series of challenge rooms while fending off zombies was thrilling. Was it as polished or inventive as, say, Dead By Daylight? No, but as a free add-on it had its perks. Issues arose the more you played, however, and the maps lost their lustre. Capcom proved early on that it wasn't willing to give it the necessary ongoing support.

If Capcom wants to make a Resident Evil multiplayer, Resistance is a good foundation.

THE RE-TURN

Flash forward a year, and we learn that set to launch alongside Resident Evil: Village was another standalone multiplayer component called RE:Verse. Duking it out across a range of familiar locations as iconic heroes like Leon, Chris, and Claire sounds like fun, but it was clear from the beta that this Resident Evil take on PvP was about as bland as the simple deathmatch setup gets. Instead of launching a new multiplayer platform, why didn't Capcom build upon the foundations it had already laid with Resistance? Sure, the latter wasn't perfect, yet at least all the playable characters handled differently and encouraged co-ordinated teamwork.

There's a sense that Capcom never really had much belief in these multiplayer offerings, not least because each was tacked onto a mainline game. If the publisher believed in making online survival horror, why not give Resistance's existing community more reasons to stay active? This could enable it to grow far beyond the free extra to Resident Evil 3 it originally was, into something that represents great value on its own.

Unfortunately, just like a wall-crawling Licker that won't stay down, RE:Verse is destined to re-emerge for players who picked up Village. My only hope is that when this happens, there's a lot more to it than the beta led us to believe. If not, Resistance deserves to live again!

COVID

WHO IS MOST AT RISK? WHAT CAN PREVENT IT?

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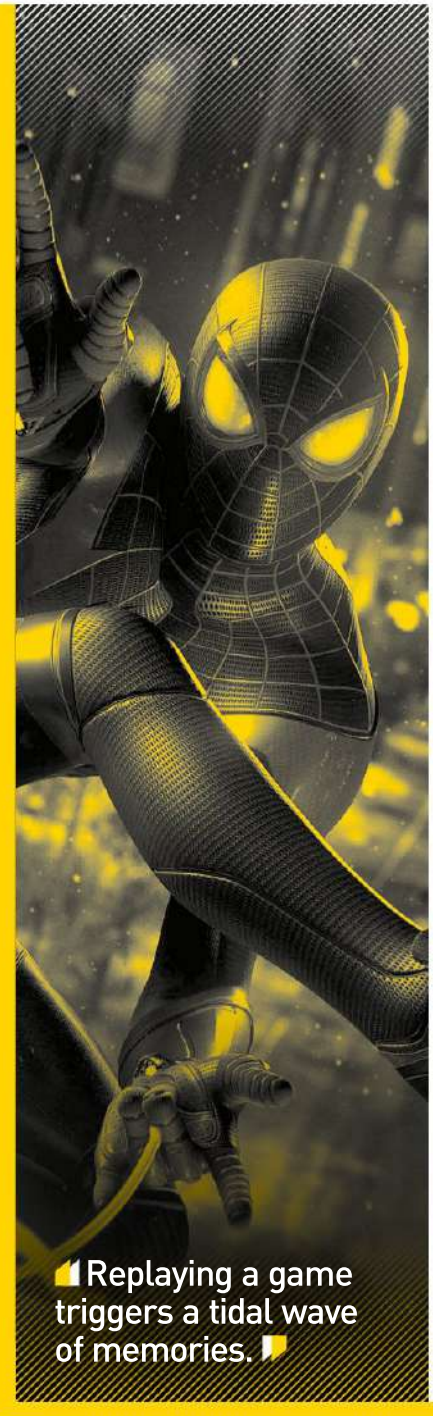

Replaying a game triggers a tidal wave of memories.

OPINION

"MEMORIES CAN HAVE A BIG IMPACT ON THE EXPERIENCE AND ENJOYMENT OF A GAME."

Experiences surrounding games can make them better or worse

WRITER BIO
After making memories playing Ratchet & Clank on PS5, Laura Francis has found her DualSense literally collecting dust and cat hair yet again.

Memories and videogames are often inextricably linked. Games create a moment in time that you can immediately be transported back to whenever you come back and revisit them. Memories and personal experiences attached to a game can either diminish or enhance it for you, but above all, can create a unique experience with it.

It can either be the light in the middle of darkness or a huge black cloud. When you do decide to replay the game or even hear it mentioned again, it triggers a tidal wave of memories. It's the experience of a game, where you were, what you were wearing, a certain point in your life, personal circumstances, and life moments that can make or break a game for you.

I remember staying up past 3am one Saturday in 2018 trying to finish Marvel's Spider-Man on PS4, a week after the game was released. I remember the exact Primark pyjamas I was wearing – those same pyjamas that accompanied me to America back in Christmas 2015 – and the thick dressing gown I took off while fighting the final boss because I was so hot. I remember playing it again on New Game Plus in preparation for my trip to New York. I played it the same weekend that I went to the Kinda Funny London meet-up, telling Greg Miller that I was in the middle of my second playthrough and that I'd Platinumed it.

The darkness of TLOU II, combined with when we played it, might make it tough to revisit.

Only a few years on, playing Spider-Man: Miles Morales late last year, swinging around a virtual wintry New York, had me recalling simpler times strolling around a chilly, bustling New York with a Starbucks hot chocolate in hand, before travel restrictions. The game made those memories of that trip flood back, pointing out all the spots I went to and making me wish I was back in NYC in winter. Last year virtual worlds became a window for a lot of us to explore places in ways we couldn't any more, the nostalgia for the games and our adventures in the real world making them all the more potent. It elevated those games to a special place in my heart.

TAINTED MEMORIES

Which isn't to mention certain viral plot threads in both Spider-Man and The Last Of Us that hit differently in the current pandemic, giving them new meaning. Revisiting those games in a post-pandemic world, you get the feeling life's been imitating art. Despite Spider-Man being a welcome getaway, there's the worry that when life knocks you down, the experience of certain games can be diminished, and thinking of them can take you back to those dark periods in your life. Will The Last Of Us Part II be forever inextricable from the current global situation? Despite how good the game is, it could rope many people back (with fantastic physics) to a not-so-great place.

There are many more moments during which games have left a mark on me and made the lowest points feel like less of a blur. But time moves on. In several years' time, we'll be looking back at the start of the PS5 era with more games to feel nostalgic over. So, here's to making fresh memories in a new console generation.

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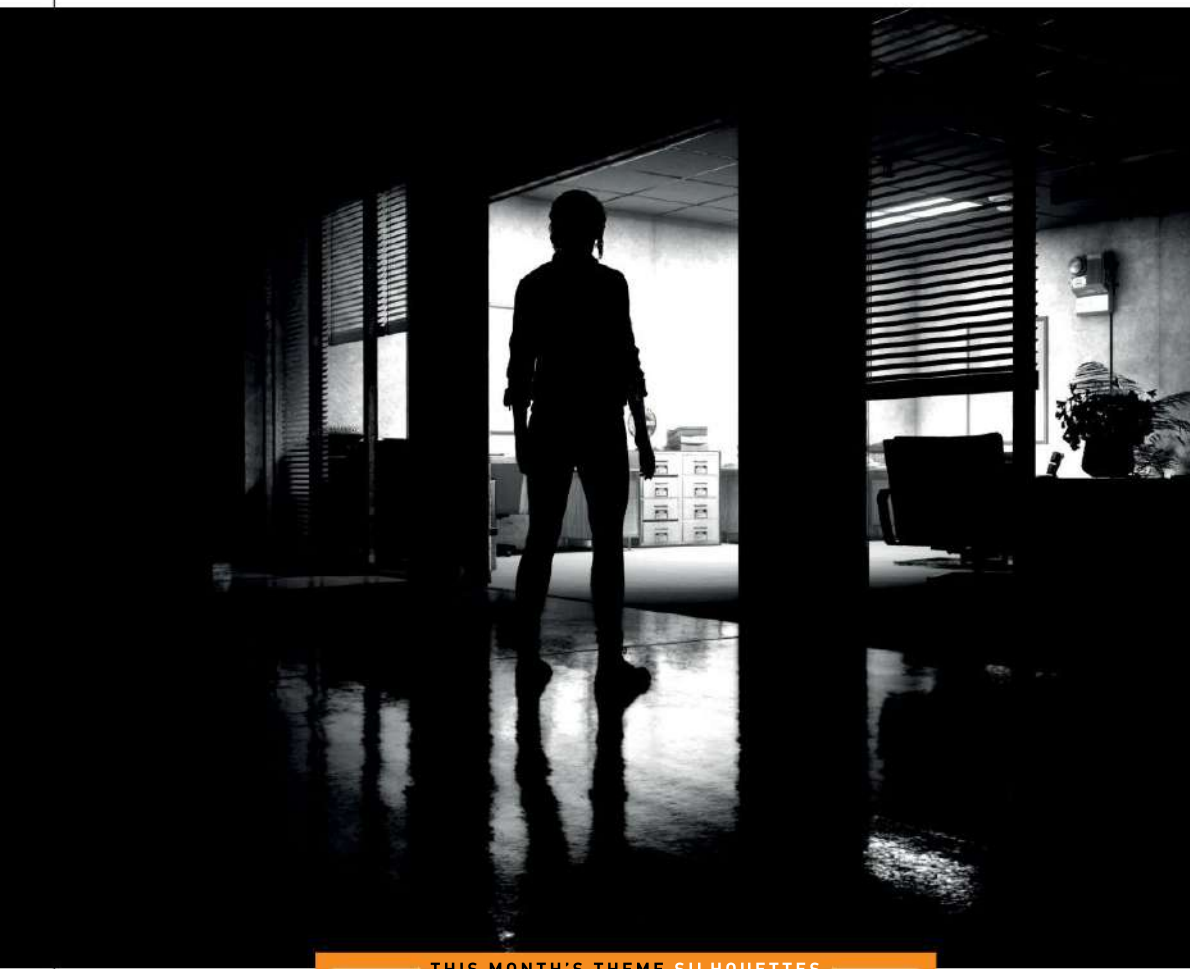

THIS MONTH'S THEME SILHOUETTES

Hot Shots

We're celebrating your very best PlayStation photo mode moments

WIN!

WRC 10 & limited-edition poster, worth up to £83.99

When it comes to good-looking games, we love a racer – the mix of shiny machines, high speed, and gritty (or grimy) surfaces gets us every time. Which is why the next winner will receive a digital code (EU) for this bout of muddy good fun, and a limited-edition poster (one of only 1000) courtesy of The Automobilist.

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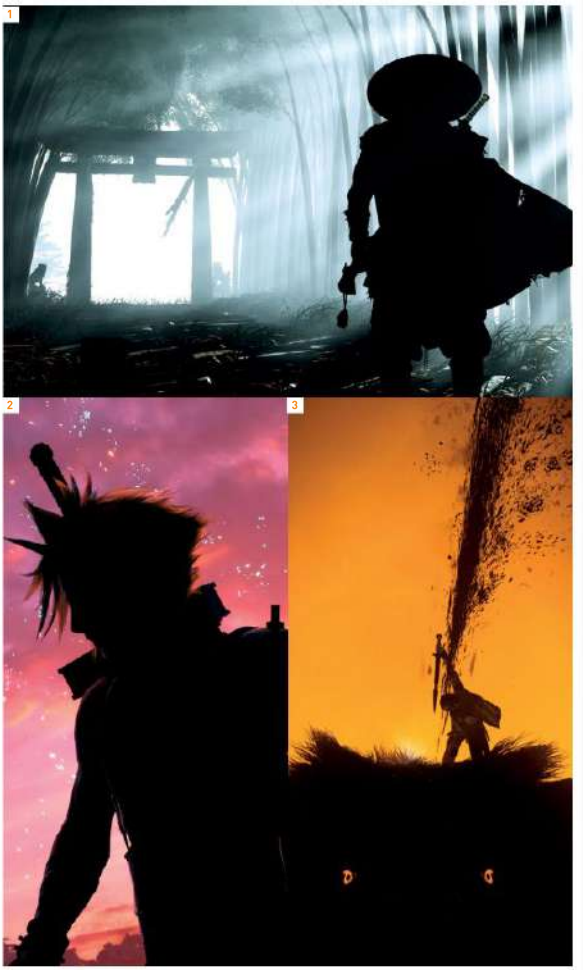
"I USED A LOW ANGLE FROM THE HALLWAY BEHIND HER, TO CATCH HER SILHOUETTE AND THE REFLECTIONS ON THE FLOOR."

Winner

Lisa Sinnaeve
Game: Control Ultimate Edition

Replaying Control in this enhanced rerelease, Sinnaeve found this shot early. "When I noticed there was a great light source coming from that room, I decided to put Jesse in the doorframe and apply the rule of thirds to pull the attention to her," she explains. "I used a low angle from the hallway behind her, to catch her silhouette and the reflections on the floor. I applied the Noir filter for the dark black and white effect."

For shots like this, Sinnaeve recommends always finding a good light source to help a photo come together. "The photo mode has a great Focus Distance and Aperture function which will provide a perfect focus on your subject or a beautiful bokeh effect," she says.



HONOURABLE MENTIONS

1 Berend De Leeuw
Game: Ghost Of Tsushima

"I chose [GOT] because of how rich it is with breathtaking vistas, themes, colours, and just sheer beauty," says De Leeuw. "I happened to arrive at Cloud Ridge Shrine when the sun was shining through the bamboo trees, creating these breathtaking god rays. I tried to create an almost heavenly feeling, as if you're on the pathway between life and death."

2 Ilyas Ben Haddou
Game: Final Fantasy VII Remake

"Good advice for this game is to combine multiple attacks and abilities that the game offers," explains Ben Haddou, highlighting Barret's Catastrophe. The game's photo mode is limited, so forcing these effects can result in a little extra oomph. "I very much like to use the Limit Breaks and attacks like Ascension and Ray Of Judgment," says Ben Haddou.

3 Andrew Coxon
Game: Shadow Of The Colossus

"To bring this Colossus down, you have to land a killing blow on top of the Colossus' head. I thought creating a silhouette while highlighting its bright orange eyes would make for an interesting shot," says Coxon. It certainly worked! Highlighting a memorable moment of gameplay – it's striking. His next stop is TLOU2, hoping to snap some emotion.

NEXT MONTH'S THEME MUD

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Previews

"BETWEEN MAX PAYNE & CONTROL."
45 Alan Wake Remastered

42 Solar Ash

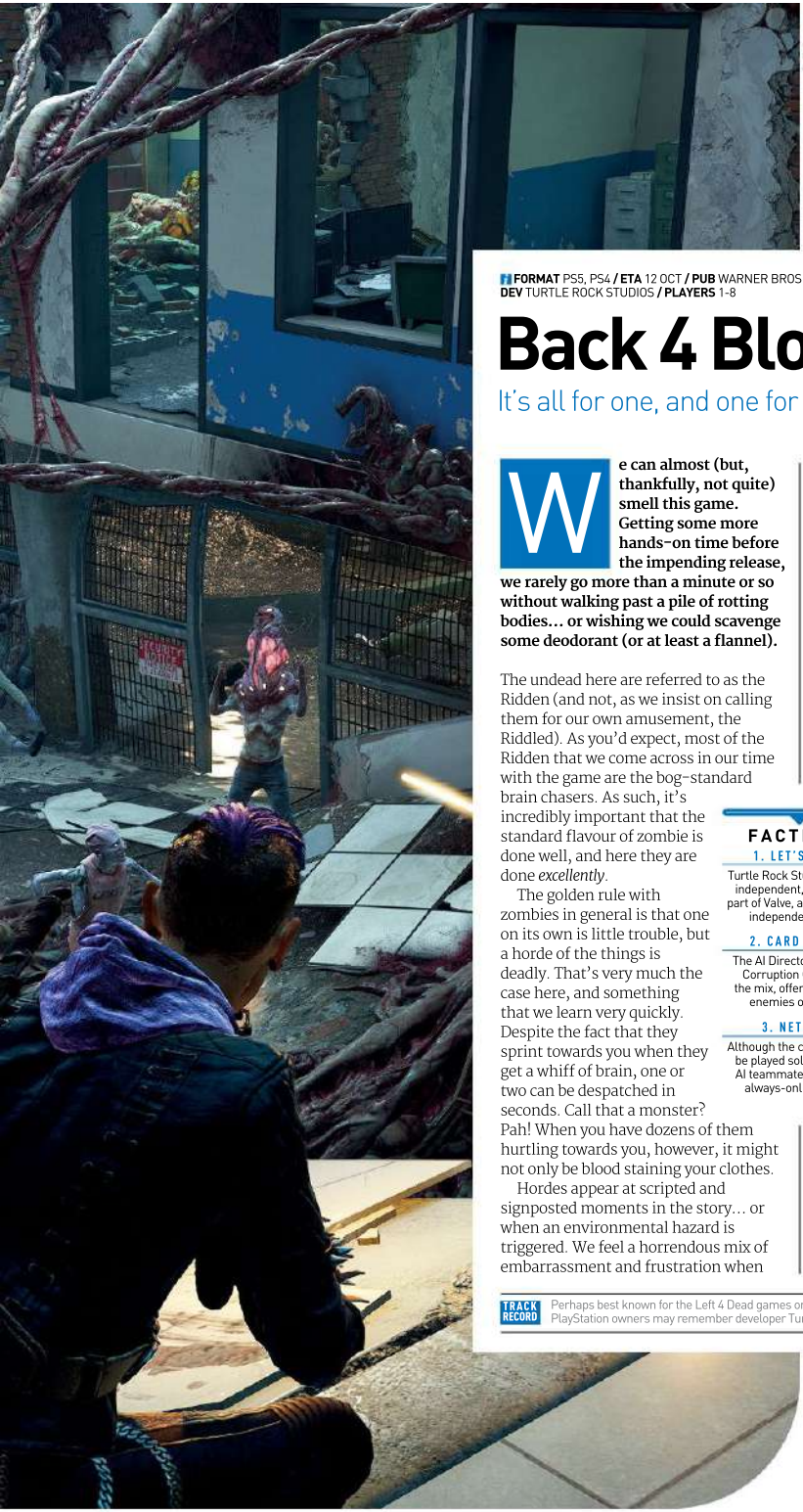
Get your skates on, and discover this neon-tinged adventure

HIGHLIGHTS

BACK 4 BLOOD 32 | JETT: THE FAR SHORE 36 | RIDERS REPUBLIC 37 | NARAKA: BLADEPOINT 38 | OXENFREE 2: LOST SIGNALS 40 | MARTHA IS DEAD 41 | SOLAR ASH 42 | CRUSADER KINGS III 44 | ARCADE SPIRITS: THE NEW CHALLENGERS 45 | NERF: LEGENDS 45 | SHOVEL KNIGHT POCKET DUNGEON 45 | THE OUTLAST TRIALS 45

Make too much noise and you'll draw the attention of the undead – and that's not a clever idea, trust us.

"IT'S INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT THAT THE STANDARD FLAVOUR OF ZOMBIE IS DONE WELL."



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Back 4 Blood

It's all for one, and one for braaaiiiinnsss

We can almost (but, thankfully, not quite) smell this game. Getting some more hands-on time before the impending release, we rarely go more than a minute or so without walking past a pile of rotting bodies… or wishing we could scavenge some deodorant (or at least a flannel).

The undead here are referred to as the Ridden (and not, as we insist on calling them for our own amusement, the Riddled). As you'd expect, most of the Ridden that we come across in our time with the game are the bog-standard brain chasers. As such, it's incredibly important that the standard flavour of zombie is done well, and here they are done *excellently*.

The golden rule with zombies in general is that one on its own is little trouble, but a horde of the things is deadly. That's very much the case here, and something that we learn very quickly. Despite the fact that they sprint towards you when they get a whiff of brain, one or two can be despatched in seconds. Call that a monster? Pah! When you have dozens of them hurtling towards you, however, it might not only be blood staining your clothes.

Hordes appear at scripted and signposted moments in the story… or when an environmental hazard is triggered. We feel a horrendous mix of embarrassment and frustration when we wander too close to a flock of birds on the ground, startling them and causing a huge number of Ridden to descend upon our team almost immediately. Whenever something like this happens, the game insists on gleefully throwing up an on-screen message shaming the culprit. Look, it was an accident, okay!?

UNDEAD HEAT

A single zombie may be no danger, but the speed and numbers of a horde demand precision and teamwork, even *before* the more powerful special types make an appearance. When we play on higher difficulties, where enemies are tougher and friendly fire deals major damage, we find that creeping around is often the best way forward. Disturbing a horde can cost dozens of bullets that none of us can afford to lose.

Headshots instantly result in an ever-satisfying spray of blood, making even the lowly pistol a viable option (most of the time). We can only carry two weapons at once, so we pick what we scavenge or purchase in safe rooms carefully. We favour a machine gun and pistol combo, though there's much to be said for the classic shotgun plus machete. Carving through enemies with such a short-range setup is great fun, but also a bit of a gamble.

The card system can tip things in your favour a little. Drawing cards from a deck (premade or one of our own) between safe rooms, we tend to go for

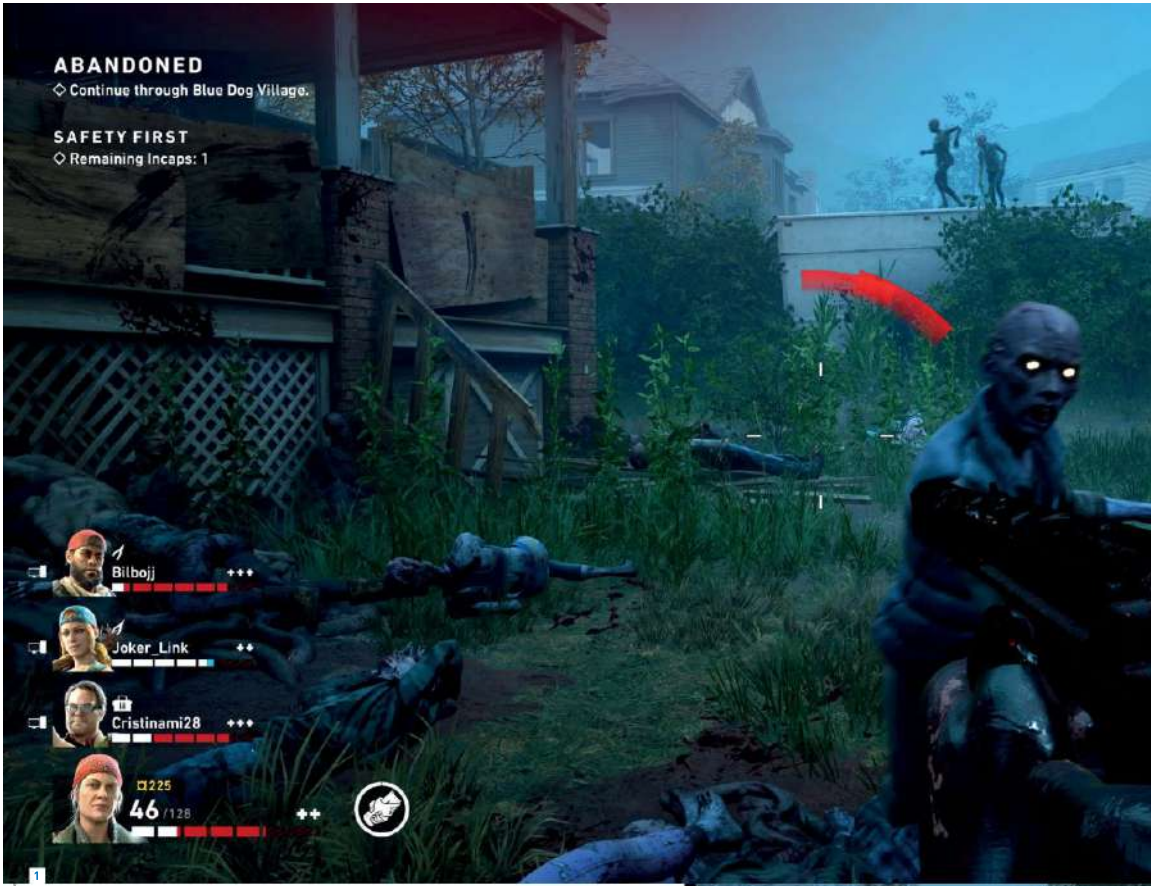
FACTRICK

1. LET'S SPLIT
Turtle Rock Studios started independent, was briefly part of Valve, and then went independent again.

2. CARD BOILED
The AI Director will throw Corruption Cards into the mix, offering tougher enemies or events.

3. NET GAIN
Although the campaign can be played solo alongside AI teammates, it'll be an always-online game.

TRACK RECORD Perhaps best known for the Left 4 Dead games on PC (to which Back 4 Blood is a spiritual successor), PlayStation owners may remember developer Turtle Rock for Evolve on PS4.



1

the ones that increase stamina, health, and ammunition for ourself or, preferably, the whole team. Any edge is a welcome one in a game where literally everything is trying to kill you.

As well as getting a taste of the campaign in our hands-on, we also try out the versus mode. In this 4v4 setup, teams take turns to survive for as long as possible against waves of zombies, including human-controlled specials (infected, that is, not the ska sort), while the play area gradually becomes smaller and smaller. It's an interesting idea that's very different from the main story-based mode.

RIDDEN ME THIS

While members of the human team get to draw from their buff-bestowing decks, those on the Ridden side earn supplies which can be spent on a variety of upgrades. This includes upgrading things like damage and defence for your chosen monster type, but upgrades can also be purchased for the CPU hordes. It's not possible to unlock everything, so buyer discretion is advised.

Our best match comes when our team spends our virtual pennies together during the Ridden rounds. We increase the hordes in number and power until they eventually become so dangerous, the enemy team is sometimes slow to notice us creeping up – making them easy prey for, say, us as a Hocker to hold a puny human in place while a teammate, playing as a Crusher, deals some serious damage.

Great as the idea is, it currently feels as though the Ridden team is at a significant disadvantage if the human team identifies their best option. Four human characters, correctly positioned so as to avoid enemy players spawning behind them and staying close together, can survive for several minutes. We've yet to try out all of the Ridden varieties and all of the maps, however, so things may balance out in the final release.

The standard zombie is perfectly judged, and the special types are tough but fair. The card system proves a great fit, and all the ingredients for a pleasingly horrific experience are there. We'll be back 4 the final version to let you know how it all comes together.

IMPRESSIONS

Could be a monster hit, if the netcode can deal with the sudden influx of players release day will bring. A small bite has left us eager to see how the whole gaming brain tastes.

2

3

1 You could do with a bit of moisturiser, mate. [We won't laugh so much when a bunch of his mates show up.] 2 Got to love a double-barrelled shotgun, though in using it you might have to get closer to the Ridden than you'd like. 3 Take a breather and choose your game mode in the hub. 4 You can build and save a variety of decks for campaign and versus. Pulling the right card can make all the difference to your chances.

Playing as the Ridden in versus mode makes a nice change. No need to worry about the horde.

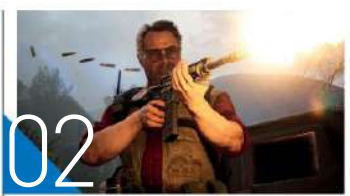
"THERE'S MUCH TO BE SAID FOR THE CLASSIC SHOTGUN PLUS MACHETE."

Blood is thicker

A taste of the good and the bad

01

The Stinger not only dual-wields jazz hands, it traps you in its phlegm from a distance. Nauseating. A teammate or the breakout card can help.



02

He looks like someone's dad, but Hoffman is one of the zombie-killing survivors. Having him in your team grants everyone an ammo increase.

03

This is the Ogre, and he's flippin' *huge*. Concentrate on the weak spots for extra damage, but most importantly, make sure you keep your distance!

Your first encounter with a Kolos is memorable, but just wait till you see it above the waves.

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 2021 / **PUB** SUPERBROTHERS, PINE SCENTED SOFTWARE / **DEV** SUPERBROTHERS, PINE SCENTED SOFTWARE / **PLAYERS** 1

Jett: The Far Shore

Strangers in a strange land

Launched into the stratosphere by the threat of imminent disaster and what legend has foretold, Mei is the first to set foot on a new planet far, far away from her home. During her first day awake after hundreds of years in a deep space torpor, she alights on the world's surface a total of three times – a number that fits snugly into her fellow crew members' early attempts at myth making.

Whenever we take to the air in our hands-on, the camera pulls way out to emphasise our place within this unexplored unknown. Surging through deep ravines, across vast oceans, and occasionally away from alien wildlife by holding down R2, we never lose sight of the titular aircraft thanks to its long contrail.

"SURGING THROUGH RAVINES, WE NEVER LOSE SIGHT OF THE TITULAR AIRCRAFT."

A SHORE THING

Pressing ⊗, we give ourselves a burst of height to navigate obstacles or trigger unexpected reactions between alien flora and fauna (there are plenty of playful opportunities to follow your curiosity). But as these explorers attempt to lay down roots with thought and care for the planet's own pre-existing ecosystem, our initial sense of wonder gives way to something else.

As Mei and her fellow pilots prepare to venture towards Tor – a peak that looms in the background under the pink and purple sky throughout all our preliminary excursions on the planet's surface – a sense of foreboding builds. Mei's co-pilot Isao spots a strange fluctuation in the Hymnwave. This interstellar calling card is partly what beckoned Mei's people across the stars, consistently maintaining its melody across many, many years. But now it's changing, and Mei's dreams that night foretell an even greater shift to come. Faith and knowledge, dreams and reality partner up in a mesmerising thematic dance as we come to the end of our hands-on, and we can't wait for more.

IMPRESSIONS

Between its beautiful looks, atmospheric score, and, of course, the Jett itself, we're eager to lift off. We'll do so later this year.

1 Known as Tor, this mountain is hiding its fair share of secrets. 2 The crew speak in a subtitled, constructed language. In first-person scenes we learn about their traditions.

gamesradar.com/playmag

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 28 OCT / **PUB** UBISOFT
DEV UBISOFT ANNECY / **PLAYERS** 1-64

Riders Republic

Biking our way to the downhill jam

This pseudo-sequel might have eschewed the Steep title, but downhill remains the king throughout our hands-on with the game's opening hours. Skis, snowboards, and wingsuits return, but it's the various bike styles (the game's new discipline) that lead the pack, and how your journey in the Republic begins.

Fortunately the bikes feel great to control as you whizz down dizzyingly dangerous tracks (which are dispersed throughout the game world, stitched together from American national parks). Not dissimilar to skiing, it's all about knowing when to sprint, and when to rein control back again. That means lightly managing your stamina on the pedals, and being ready to slam on the brakes for a hard drift around a bend, lest you go ragdolling off an incline.

The only thing more painful than such mid-trick radical tumbles is the cringeworthy tone. It's an awkward approximation of youth culture that feels desperate (all out-of-touch slang and Gangsta's Paradise covers). It feels like scrolling your uncle's Facebook page. Don't get us started on the awful, Family Guy-style cutaway gags. Stick to biking, please.

IMPRESSIONS

Revised handling and trick systems make for an impressively playable variety of extreme sports, but you'll need to bat away the cringe to get to its fun heart.

1 Giraffe outfits, dino suits... you can sport quite the fashion collection. 2 Mass races with 64 players begin chaotically. 3 The skies are less crowded than the slopes. 4 Youth culture or cringe culture? 5 The jet ski gets you quickly from point to point (and isn't a sport itself).

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** TBC / **PUB** NETEASE GAMES MONTREAL / **DEV** 24 ENTERTAINMENT / **PLAYERS** 60

Naraka: Bladepoint

We grapple with the wuxia royale

Getting tired of battle royales with guns and gritty military vibes? Then look eastward, because one featuring melee-based martial arts and drawing on Asian culture and mythology is coming to PlayStation to give the genre a welcome boot up the behind. After Hunter's Arena: Legends made its entrance this summer, Naraka: Bladepoint is coming for the crown next with one unique, and literal, hook.

In addition to duking it out with other players (solo or as part of a team of three), grappling is core to Naraka's philosophy of "unchained combat". Once you're in possession of grappling spools, you can aim and fire anywhere within reach to grapple across to that position – and, more importantly, close the distance on other players. You aim using L2, and the crosshair changes colour when a target is both in sight and within reach, which is a great way to flush out a sneaky player who's hiding in a bush or up in the trees hoping to get the drop on you.

Spools are common enough among all the loot scattered over Morus Isle, which is where Naraka's 60-player matches take place. However, inventory space is a premium and you'll want to carry healing items as well as weapon and armour repair kits too. In that respect, the loop of amassing more loot to improve your chances of survival as the map shrinks to a smaller circle surrounded by a purple demonic aura still follows the battle royale template, though it's more forgiving than many of its peers in some areas.

FACTRICK

1. HELL YEAH

The Sanskrit word Naraka is a term for hell in several religions, including Buddhism and Hinduism.

2. ON THE RADAR

Targeting a player via a contract will mean they show up on the map, although only a general radius is indicated.

3. LUCKY CHARM

Golden darumas are hidden around the loading hub. Collect all six in time and everyone gets a reward.

THRICE AND DICE

When playing as part of a trio, if you're unlucky enough to meet your demise early on (before the playable area of the map starts shrinking for the second time), it's not immediately game over as your soul can still wander around the map, and you've got one chance to resurrect yourself. Just head to the nearest Altar Of Souls, which will resurrect you and even give you some basic gear when you return. When playing in a group, we recognise some best practices introduced by Apex Legends, from the handy ping system to the ability to revive teammates, as well as (of course) the heroes themselves.

Who you choose to play as matters. Each hero has a unique cooldown skill and ultimate that, when used at the right time, can really turn the tide in battle. Viper Ning's all-seeing Twilight Crimson is especially devastating as it can leave all nearby enemies stunned for five seconds – that's just enough time to get in for a deadly charged-up attack. Kurumi, meanwhile, is essential in a party since she can heal teammates, though she won't be able to attack herself when that skill is active.

> "THE ULTIMATE DRAW IS NARAKA'S MELEE COMBAT."

FIGHTING INSTINCT

The ultimate draw, and what sets this apart from other battle royales, is Naraka's melee combat. Though similar to the fighting in medieval action game For Honor, it takes a while to figure out compared to a shooter. Like in Dark Souls, you can lock onto opponents, and use a combination of light (R1) or heavy (R2) attacks, while holding either charges up a focus attack. There's no way to block but you can parry – albeit awkwardly, as you not only have to time it right but also to press both attack buttons – which actually disarms your opponent. It forms a rock, paper, scissors hierarchy, in that focus attacks can absorb normal attacks and parries only work against focus attacks.

While there are thrills to facing an opponent one-on-one like in a fighting game, complete with the mind games and fake-outs, these moments are pretty rare. Let's face it, battle royales don't foster the same sense of honour as fighting games, and it's far easier to sneak in on a duel or for teams to gang up on a single player. As you're most likely to run into an enemy while scrambling for loot in the denser environments, you'll find yourself not only fighting an opponent but also the camera and scenery (which you can easily get stuck on when cornered during a tense showdown). Find a player who's willing to duel with you like a warrior, though, and the results can feel epic.

IMPRESSIONS

Naraka's grappling and punishing melee is a fresh twist on battle royale – and though it won't stop players from fighting dishonourably, defeat up close beats getting sniped again.

TRACK RECORD 24 Entertainment is a new studio based in Hangzhou, China and Naraka: Bladepoint is its debut game. Lead producer Ray Kuan's credits, however, include 2002 online martial arts PC game Meteor Blade, which was only released in China.

4 Grappling is essential for getting around as well as hooking onto unsuspecting players for a pre-emptive strike. Just make sure you don't run out of grappling spools. 5 Some players may want to fight others head-on, but it also pays to be sneaky. 6 Close-quarters melee may be Naraka's USP but there is a good quantity of ranged weapons available in addition to melee ones.

1 Dragon god Moonbane occasionally appears to try to strike down players with lightning. 2 Colour-coding of focus attacks (blue) and parries (red) helps make the fast-paced combat readable. 3 It's always wise to stick together in trio matches – if you get outnumbered, expect to get wrecked.

You can spot Edwards Island in the distance – did the transmitters unwittingly awaken something there?

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 2022 / **PUB** MWM INTERACTIVE / **DEV** NIGHTSCHOOL STUDIO / **PLAYERS** 1

Oxenfree 2: Lost Signals

The ghosts are back in town

Surprise! After 2019's hellish bar-crawl Afterparty, Nightschool Studio returns to the world of its first game, Oxenfree, to once again spin a creepy tale about restless ghosts and radio signals. Several years after the events of the first game, the ghosts protagonist Alex unwittingly awoke with her radio seem to have cast their eyes towards her hometown of Camena, Oregon.

But Alex isn't the one who discovers the town's otherworldly presence this time around. Instead, things start to go wrong all across Camena – radios transmit only static, televisions turn on and off, so everyone knows something isn't right. You take control of Riley Poverly, a newly-minted research assistant tasked with plonking down radio transmitters around town and collecting their data. What comes next is hardly a spoiler: just like Alex before her, Riley will tune into the ghosts in the radio waves.

> "TUNE INTO THE GHOSTS IN THE RADIO WAVES."

LIFE OF RILEY

But Nightschool has already revealed that there's a lot more to Oxenfree 2 than there was to its predecessor, including more of the time travel the first game only hinted at, as well as a mining town to explore – and those are always spooky. In Riley, the studio also explores a new kind of character. Whereas Alex and her friends had just finished high school and Lola and Milo in Afterparty were college graduates, Riley is an adult in need of direction, aimlessly sloshing around her hometown. As is customary in Nightschool games, she too will probably have to face her personal demons before she can solve Camena's ghost problem.

As you can see from the first images of the game, Oxenfree 2 is going for the same vibe as its predecessor, both in its visuals and action. Camena looks similar to the first game's setting, nearby Edwards Island, and everything you do is once again built around Nightschool's natural-sounding conversation system. We look forward to being spooked in style.

IMPRESSIONS

We're looking forward to exploring Camena and getting stuck into another haunting supernatural adventure.

You pick your response during conversations. Choices are at the heart of the storytelling.

ON THE HORIZON

The next six months, mapped out

02 months

FINAL FANTASY XIV: ENDWALKER

The latest expansion to the MMO promises the moon. Literally, as a new area.

FORMAT PS5,PS4 / **ETA** 19 NOV / **PUB** SQUARE ENIX

04 months

ELDEN RING

It's hard to believe it's so soon, but this successor to Dark Souls is about to put a ring on it, hooking us with its open-world twist.

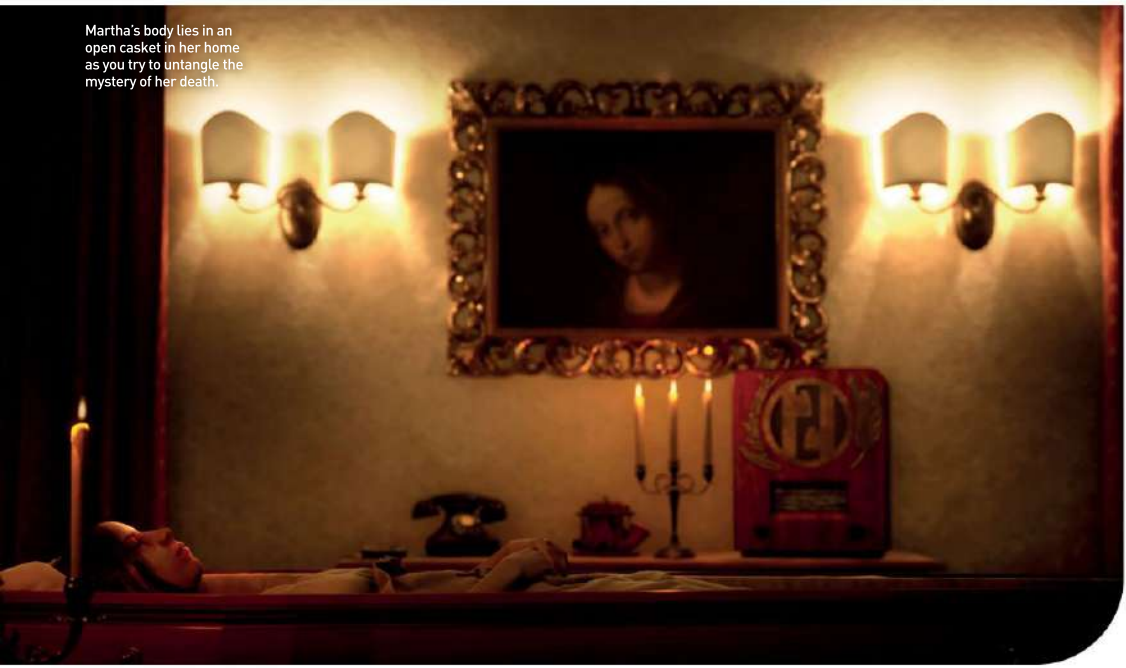
FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 21 JAN / **PUB** BANDAI NAMCO

06 months

TINY TINA'S WONDERLANDS

This Borderlands spin-off is essentially going to be D&D with guns.

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** EARLY 2022 / **PUB** 2K GAMES



Martha's body lies in an open casket in her home as you try to untangle the mystery of her death.

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** 2021 / **PUB** WIRED PRODUCTIONS / **DEV** LKA / **PLAYERS** 1

Martha Is Dead

Framing a psychological thriller

The legend of the White Lady haunts our hands-on. We see a child beg her nanny repeatedly to read the tale of a beautiful woman drowned by her jealous lover. Distinctive storybook illustration recounts her return as a vengeful spirit that then snatches young ladies who venture too close to the water's edge.

By a misty lake, our protagonist fiddles with a film camera, glimpsing something floating in the water through the viewfinder. Adjusting the lens and bringing our subject into focus, it appears The White Lady has claimed another victim. We tear off into the water in the hopes of saving the girl. It's only when we drag the body ashore that we realise that there's no hope and that Martha is dead.

"PERIOD-ACCURATE PHOTOGRAPHY PLAYS A ROLE IN OUR INVESTIGATION."

SOMETHING IN THE WATER

Town Of Light developer LKA returns with another sun-soaked horror set in 1940s Tuscany. As we dig into the mystery surrounding Martha's untimely death, period-accurate photography plays a lead role in our investigation, allowing us to record clues. It's a technical business; when we get our camera out to snap a sparrow, we manually tweak the aperture and adjust the focus ourselves using the controller's shoulder buttons. The darkroom process has been greatly streamlined for its mechanical appearance here, but there are still a number of adjustable parameters that affect how your final image looks.

At night we return to the lakeside, searching for answers and armed with a new flash attachment. Picking our way towards the water's edge by lantern light, we glimpse a figure all in white. Has the White Lady set her sights on her next victim? We don't stick around to find out, running through an especially surreal sequence that ends on a gory tableau. We're left certain of one thing: there's more shade than light to this mystery.

IMPRESSIONS

Mystery ripples across the surface of this one. Period-accurate camera equipment provides a compelling mechanical hook.

1

2

1 The news claims political enemies of Martha's father are responsible for her death.
2 Despite Martha's bloodless passing, our hands-on features some gory sequences.

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 26 OCT / **PUB** ANNAPURNA INTERACTIVE
DEV HEART MACHINE / **PLAYERS** 1

Solar Ash

An adventure platformer enjoying more than a moment in the sun

As protagonist Rei skates through acid-toned environments between colossal boss fights, the speedrunning community is never far from our mind. There's a breeziness to gliding across Solar Ash's deep space clouds that is joyful – and makes us wonder how runners will get the most out of the movement.

There's much more to developer Heart Machine's second game than the joy of traversal, though. Between Rei needling colossal bosses and exploring strange ruins, there are other signs of life to discover, and people to meet. Particularly memorable among these NPCs is someone who talks about maintaining a connection with 'The Elders' and mind-melding with their mycelium collective.

"That's Ahrric," director Alx Preston tells us. "He's a bit of a weirdo."

We stop ourselves from quipping that he seems like a real fun-guy to us.

VOID RUNNING FOR GLORY

Rei seeks an audience with Ahrric's mouldering elders as she's hoping they know something about the dismembered demigod we keep glimpsing. After felling a spindly limbed boss earlier, Rei found herself in this demigod's grasp once again. We learn their name is Echo and we are apparently the source of their anger and pain – though Rei appears as confused as to exactly why this should be the case as we are.

TRACK RECORD Heart Machine's first game, Hyper Light Drifter, debuted in 2016. Besides sharing a neon accented-palette with Solar Ash, director Alx Preston also says both games take place in the same universe.

As we explore a cellar overrun with toadstools, we have to mix and match glowing, colour-coded spores to gain access to its darker depths. The Elders below then require us to recite a lengthy passphrase known as the Spore Song before they will answer our questions. Now, how did that go again – something about the word 'crepuscular'…?

Taking you between these puzzle elements and the memorably out-there characters, the fluid movement really is the heart of the experience. Returning to our earlier point, we ask Alx Preston about his thoughts on speedrunning, and how Solar Ash might appeal to speedrunners. After saying he looks forward to charity event Awesome Games Done Quick every year, he says, "I want to see people break the fuck out of our game. That would be really fun!"

After uncovering Solar Ash's secrets and learning all about Echo this October, we look forward to seeing what tricks the speedrunning community uncovers in years to come.

IMPRESSIONS

As Rei jumps into a black hole to save her planet, we're right there with her. Having seen its breathtaking, acid toned views, its slick movement, and science-fantasy story, we're keen to dive into Solar Ash.

FACTRICK

1. FAMILY

While there's a resemblance to Hyper Light Drifter, Solar Ash is designed to be more accessible.

2. PLUGGING IN

Though Alx Preston doesn't speedrun, he tells us he enjoys Summoning Salt's mini-documentaries on it.

3. ALL IN THE NAME

The game was announced in 2019 as Solar Ash Kingdom but during development the last word was dropped.

"WE STOP OURSELVES FROM QUIPPING THAT HE SEEMS LIKE A REAL FUN-GUY TO US."

"SCHEME YOUR WAY TO THE VERY TOP ON BEHALF OF YOUR FAMILY."

Crusader Kings III

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** TBC / **PUB** PARADOX INTERACTIVE
DEV PARADOX INTERACTIVE, LAB42 / **PLAYERS** 64

Kingdoms are all about the people. Which is why, as one of the ruling folk, you need to use them for your own benefit. This strategy series finally leaps to console, allowing us to get involved in the politicking and relationship building that power this empire builder. It's less about big scraps and invasions, more about building a dynasty and scheming your way to the top on behalf of your family as everyone around you does the same, leading to unique tales of betrayal. Paradox has dedicated itself to making the game feel good to play on DualSense, and will even use the controller's unique features to help you "experience the game's stress mechanics" firsthand.

Arcade Spirits: The New Challengers

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** EARLY 2022
PUB PQUBE / **DEV** FICTION FACTORY GAMES / **PLAYERS** 1

The first game saw you working in an arcade while looking for love, but now it's time to actually play in one. This sequel has you joining a gamer team as you take part in the Fist Of Discomfort 2 Pro Tour. Along the way you'll grow closer to the six new characters (some return from the last game too). Whether you aim for love or friendship is up to you, as is whether you play the in-game game itself – the minigame is skippable. You can design a custom character (and how your rival looks), who this time around is visually represented in the scenes quite a bit. If you played the first one, you can even import your decisions, which will have some effect on the story.

Young Souls

FORMAT PS4 / **ETA** 30 SEP
PUB THE ARCADE CREW / **DEV** 1P2P
PLAYERS 1-2

Just as this combines the worlds of RPGs and brawlers, it also smashes together modern urban life with a fantasy realm filled with goblins – many not friendly.

Jenn and Tristan are orphans, and their scientist foster father's disappearance throws a spanner in the familial works. A portal to the aforementioned world in their pa's basement gives them a clue where he's gone – they're not hopping worlds for the fun of it. Supporting co-op play, it's up to the twins to slash their way through four biomes to find their dad. That means hitting the gym in our world and buying new clothes for protection, before jumping over to fight goblins – then doing it all over again. It's a neat mix of modern life and fantasy, with lovely visuals.

Nerf: Legends

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** OCT 2021
PUB GAMEMILL ENTERTAINMENT
DEV FUNLABS / **PLAYERS** 1-8

One for the rubber lovers among us, this brings the real-life toy arsenal into the digital world. No, you're not rolling around back gardens taking cover behind gnomes and sagging paddling pools. This leans into the story of the Nerf world, so you're battling robots in a science-fiction land of the future, while pulling off trick shots using weapons based on Nerf toys, and we're promised 19 levels of blasting.

As well as multiplayer that supports 4v4 and eight-person free-for-all (which you can play as your own custom avatar), it's got a solid campaign mode where you shoot your way through a futuristic story, which is more than Battlefield 2042 can say. Just play nice, and don't make your little brother cry.

Cult Of The Lamb

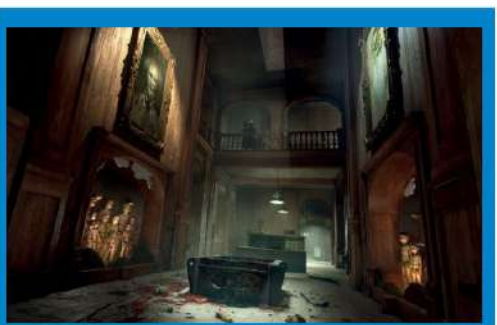
FORMAT TBC / **ETA** 2022
PUB DEVOLVER DIGITAL
DEV MASSIVE MONSTER / **PLAYERS** 1

Cutesy gets a little creepy in this pseudo-horror woodland world. Our lamb hero is saved from a brutal execution by a strange, ominous being. And what better way to show your appreciation than by starting a cult? Still possessed by the creature, it's up to you to build your cult's base of operations while adventuring through dungeons to help it grow, and to depose sacrilegious rival cults too. The more you spread the good word, the more your cult will expand, and the more powerful you'll become. With a roguelike structure, the more you instil faith in your flock of followers, the easier a time you'll have in the action-packed dungeons as you avoid death. We're praying that this one is as good as it looks.

Shovel Knight Pocket Dungeon

FORMAT PS4 / **ETA** WINTER 2021
PUB YACHT CLUB GAMES / **DEV** VINE, YACHT CLUB GAMES / **PLAYERS** 1-2

Take off your twitchy Mega Man platforming fingers and replace them with the pondering kind to place on your chin. This spin-off to the tough jumper is built around block-based puzzles that take place on a Columns-like board. These are how you fight and hunt for treasure, encountered as you bump into enemies when dungeon crawling from a top-down perspective. Each of the ten different heroes you can play as brings unique powers to these puzzle-offs, and can even pick up new equipment that'll give you an edge. Puzzle Knight is on hand to guide you through the experience in the full story mode, or you can dig your way into the versus mode and take on a friend.



The Outlast Trials

FORMAT TBC / **ETA** 2022 / **PUB** RED BARRELS
DEV RED BARRELS / **PLAYERS** 1-4

We took a look at this back in 2019 when it was just a spooky concept. Now much more has been revealed of this multiplayer take on the horror series. Forced to become a guinea pig for the Murkoff Corporation, you need to survive deadly tests in creepy environments ranging from abandoned carnivals to dusty mansions. You can play solo or in co-op – working together might make things easier. Or you could use your pal to distract threats long enough for you to make your own escape...

Alan Wake Remastered

FORMAT PS5, PS4
ETA AUTUMN 2021 / **PUB** EPIC GAMES
DEV REMEDY ENTERTAINMENT
PLAYERS 1

Put a fresh cup of coffee on the stove, because retelling this story is going to result in one long night, and marks the first time the series has come to PlayStation. A halfway house between Max Payne and Control, author Alan Wake's fight against the forces of darkness channels the likes of The Twilight Zone and Twin Peaks. Alan's wife vanishes when a holiday goes bad. As he looks for her, Alan uses a flashlight to burn away shadowy foes, while finding the events were predicted... in his own writing.

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 7 OCT / **PUB** UBISOFT / **DEV** UBISOFT TORONTO / **PLAYERS** 1

Far Cry 6

Oscar Taylor-Kent makes friends with the wildlife

We only review finished games, so in Viewpoint we go hands-on with near-final code of a game that just missed our review deadline. Playing several hours of the game's opening and some from later on, Oscar's Yaran travel report is in.

Under Antón Castillo's leadership, Yara, for many, isn't a very pleasant place to live. He's split its people into True Yarans and Fake Yarans, the latter oppressed and exploited to benefit the former. Hence you and your pals decide to try to get out. Playing as Dani Rojas (it's your choice whether they're male or female), the thrilling opening has you making your way to a boat in an attempt to seek asylum across the sea in America.

Needless to say, things don't go well, and you're washed up on a beach alone, conveniently a short hike from rebel group Libertad's temporary base of operations. It's a strong opening, captivating performances from Dani and the villainous Castillo selling the hopelessness of the situation. When Dani agrees to help Libertad acquire boats to head for Yara's mainland in exchange for a way to escape the country, the emotions feel completely genuine. Though, of course, we know the escape will never happen. As with any Far Cry open-world sandbox, we're here for the long haul.

TOOTH AND CLAW

And it's a dangerous world. We play through the entire opening area of the game, and there's a real sense that even there, at the fringe of Castillo's control, much of the space is enemy territory. Even the animals have it in for you, eager to pounce and ruin an attempt to be stealthy.

That said, you'd be forgiven for thinking Far Cry 6 started life as some kind of Doctor Doolittle tie-in. Animal amigo 'fangs for hire' are frontloaded into the experience, with Guapo the crocodile by our side for the whole opening area. Sporting a jacket and a hatred for fascism, he takes a shine to us as his other partner, Juan Cortez, says that Guapo fights for who he feels needs him the most.

Cortez is a guerrilla warfare specialist whose help you enlist on behalf of Libertad, the rules in his self-help book on military actions forming the titles of the game's chapters. He's enthusiastic about crafting his own weaponry, quickly outfitting you with resolver weapons and supremo backpacks. The former are special weapons like a cobbled-together flamethrower or EMP gun (watch out, they can overheat), and the latter are a little like ultimate attacks, unusual for a sandbox FPS. Hit L1 and R1 after despatching enough enemies to unleash whichever power you have equipped, which can be anything from a barrage of missiles to an electrified area-of-effect strike. Regular weapons are customisable, but feel boring in comparison to the more inventive side of your arsenal.

SUNDAY ROOST

Far Cry 6 is a game of two halves tonally. In much the same way, you can often choose whether to attack enemy camps head-on or stealthily. On one hand, there's real dramatic weight to some character moments. On the other, at times it's goofy. Whereas some games, like Yakuza, manage the balancing act, here you get tonal whiplash.

This only increases as we're shunted further into the game to explore more side-activities (at what seems to be a sort of midpoint given our expanded loadout). Along with Guapo (our scaly attack friend) and Chorizo (a lovable sausage dog who excels in distraction), we take on a mission to unlock Chicharrón. He's a punk-rock rooster with knives attached to his feet, who cluckingly implores us to help him massacre an entire outpost's supply of genetically engineered attack dogs, tag it with graffiti in his own image, and then shred the research papers in a nearby facility. All while cheesy rock music plays. It feels like we're playing Deadly Premonition. Yet somehow, it never feels as cringey as the likes of Watch Dogs Legion or Riders Republic thanks to the well-drawn characters. We can't speak to how it does by its Cuban-inspirations, but there seems to be some real heart at its core.

We spend the rest of our time clearing checkpoints, camps, and forts as we take back the island for Libertad. It's the kind of action you expect in Far Cry. Guerrilla paths are a neat addition, off-road routes that exploit Dani's nimble movement. When you're in a hurry vehicles are obviously quicker, and the game isn't shy to give you access to them – you're able to call up a car for delivery or ride one of the many horses. The main missions are fast-paced too, with a lot of optional activities offloaded into side-missions. It keeps the story moving at a pleasant clip, perhaps influenced by Assassin's Creed Valhalla's similar approach, side-content often only waypointing diegetically when you see it or obtain intel. You'll certainly keep busy.

VIEWPOINT

"A BIZARRE TONAL MIX THAT CAN'T DECIDE IF IT'S DRAMATIC OR SILLY. NEVERTHELESS, ANIMAL PALS AND SPECIAL GUNS MEANS IT PLAYS EVEN BETTER THAN PAST ENTRIES."

We'll have our full, in-depth review of Far Cry 6 in our next issue.

3

4

1 Combine home-made resolver weapons ('resolver' is a Cuban philosophy of make-do-and-mend) with your supremo backpack to dish out devastating damage. So much for stealth! **2** Use your camera phone to tag points of interest and enemies, even revealing their bullet weaknesses. There's an app for everything. **3** The '67 revolution has become legendary. Find the retired revolutionary icons in the mountains and recruit them. **4** Guerrilla paths make movement through the jungles a breeze.

Vitae, vampires, and song

Maxime Moze and Laure Delmas talk to Jess Kinghorn about Big Bad Wolf's next pretty little ditty, **Vampire: The Masquerade – Swansong**

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** FEB 2022 / **PUB** NACON
DEV BIG BAD WOLF / **PLAYERS** 1

Dead like me

Meet your three dead-and-loving-it protagonists

Leysha

Clan: The unconventional and irregular clan of the moon, Malkavian

Laure Delmas, who is both the game's writer and a clinical psychologist, tells us the team has taken particular care in how they portray the Malkavian clan's fractured perspective. She tells us, "We thought it was more interesting to build a realistic psychopathology than exploiting the well-known and clichéd 'goofy' or 'sadistic' psychopath. Leysha's character sheet is built upon a true clinical test, avoiding any caricature." As she searches for her daughter, Halsey, we can see Leysha is caught at a crossroads of perception. This is both a curse and a blessing, as it allows Leysha to hide reality behind illusion. The Obfuscate discipline can be used to hide potential Masquerade violations or indeed Leysha herself from the view of humans. Maxime Moze says this ability is especially useful as it allows Leysha to pretend "to be some important person or to access high-security areas."

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – SWANSONG

These modern nights are unpredictable at the best of times. As Vampire: The Masquerade – Swansong begins, vampires are under threat. Across the pond London is no longer a safe home for their kind, and stateside Kindred are forced to set aside clan politics in an anxious bid for survival. Under the guidance of its newest Prince, Boston tries to reclaim its former glory by merging into a unified domain with Hartford, Connecticut. But this bid for stability is threatened when peace treaty celebrations erupt into a violent bloodbath.

That's the point at which you enter this mess. Singing from the same hymn sheet as the massively popular Vampire: The Masquerade tabletop roleplaying game, you play as three vampires already established in Boston – there are no baby vamps warbling here. Vampire: The Masquerade – Swansong's lead quest designer Maxime Moze tells us, "Even though [each of the protagonists] has their own agenda, the three of them have one thing in common: for reasons unknown they are the only ones the Prince wants to talk to in this time of crisis."

Boston's Prince, Hazel Iversen, rose to power with unusual swiftness given the usual glacial pace of vampire politics. Writer Laure Delmas describes her as "a clever being who knows how to keep up appearances." As Prince, Hazel has her mind set on restoring Boston's status while keeping her enemies close. Her widely renowned charisma has earned her the title 'The Swan.' Whether she can be trusted is beside the point given how much power she wields, and when she summons your three protagonists to an audience with her they've no choice but to acquiesce.

Moze says, "The missions she sends [the protagonists] on will allow you to have a different perspective on the unfolding events, and it is your ability to connect things together that will allow you to have the full vision [of] the story."

THREE-PART HARMONY

Laure Delmas assures us that this story has been written to be accessible regardless of your familiarity with the TTRPG. "With three heroes from different clans, Swansong gives an overview of a part of the World Of Darkness," she tells us, adding "Our story is built upon the pillars of this fantasy world (clans, Camarilla, [etc]), and so we sought an experience balanced between one that's friendly for newcomers, with enough tutorials and explanation, but satisfying for core World Of Darkness fans."

"AN EXPERIENCE THAT'S FRIENDLY FOR NEWCOMERS, BUT SATISFYING FOR CORE WORLD OF DARKNESS FANS."

You won't be able to switch freely between the three protagonists, as specific scenarios have been written for each of them, but occasionally you will be able to choose the order in which you play scenes.

Moze says, slightly mysteriously, "As every event in the game is connected, that choice will shape your comprehension on things and might prompt you to make different decisions depending on what you have – or haven't – seen before."

The protagonists' powers mean they each take a different approach to investigation.

Now *that*'s a Masquerade violation. The Boston elders aren't going to like that.

As in the studio's first game, The Council, you may also miss key details depending on your skills. Moze is quick to point out that this time there are multiple ways for your characters to stumble upon the same delicious morsel of gossip but he adds, "Be aware, though, that there is not that much information we class as absolutely necessary to progress through the game, and we know that the devil lies in the detail…"

Oh, we do love a cryptic warning! But no Kindred is an island, and the choices you make as any one of the protagonists will be felt across the story by all three characters.

Delmas tells us, "We raised the bar of the consequences, introducing also repercussions between the three protagonists. In Swansong, Galeb, Emem, and Leysha may pay the price of choices which were not their own."

Moze tells us, "Sometimes your actions will have immediate consequences, sometimes you'll only witness them in the long run. Sometimes another action will cancel out a previous one… Consequences really will have different types of manifestations and impacts, which we believe is what makes them interesting in the end."

WITH TEETH

While Swansong won't be episodic like predecessor The Council, the family resemblance is clear.

"The Council set the foundation, the DNA, of our studio," Delmas says, "Our dialogue/fight system fit particularly well with the political conspiracies, mysteries, and conflicts of interest in the World Of Darkness."

Galeb Bazory

Clan: The power-hungry clan of kings, Ventrue

Laure Delmas tells us Galeb feels a strong sense of duty towards the Camarilla, one of the largest and most traditionalist vampiric sects. That said, Galeb has seen plenty of sea changes – literally and metaphorically – in his un-lifetime and he knows perhaps better than most just how easily empires crumble. As such, he's not one to waste his time on those he deems weak-willed. Any human who stands in his way is likely to get a taste of the Ventrue speciality of psychically overwhelming them with the vampire's own will. While Galeb is perfectly capable of manipulating others through words alone, the Dominate ability offers a quicker means to the same end.

Galeb, having seen it all and done it all, exudes an unmistakable aura of "I'm far too old for this nonsense."

Emem Louis

Clan: The bold and beautiful clan of the rose, Toreador

Writer Laure Delmas describes Emem as possessing "blazing ambition," and it's safe to suppose her co-operation with The Swan is out of a desire for political advancement as much as anything else. Boasting the trademark Toreador allure and charm, she's the definition of a people person. On missions for Boston's prince, her Celerity ability allows her to move with supernatural swiftness and, in addition to unique options in conversation, also gives her new ways to explore environments.

Emem is as ambitious as she is alluring and she's determined to get what she wants.

Now Boston's merging with Hartford, this party is going to get a lot more crowded.

The confrontations in The Council that Delmas alludes to make dialogue a tense and occasionally deadly dance. In that game, when squaring off against an NPC you put your chosen skills to the test by persuading your conversational partner to see or do things your way. Every character is vulnerable to a particular line of reasoning but to seal the deal you often need to use a dialogue skill and expend effort points to get your argument to land. As a vampire in Swansong there's a similar system at play and you still have plenty of opportunity to talk your way out of trouble, but you've also got a wider variety of skills at your disposal.

Moze elaborates on this, saying "The skill-based system used in Swansong will be quite different from the one used in The Council. Because you'll be playing quite powerful vampires, you'll have many more abilities to deal with the situations you'll be facing in the game."

Your three protagonists all hail from different vampire clans, and each is bestowed with bloodline-specific disciplines and banes which have an impact on what you do. As you pick your way forward, each protagonist has special options when it comes to unravelling the mystery. Moze says your approach will depend on, "what you've uncovered so far, the resources you still have, and, of course, your own preference."

But your vampiric skills come at a cost: vitae. Replacing The Council's effort points, this preternatural energy comes from the blood the fanged trio drink, and is depleted every time you use your special abilities to get what you want.

"You'll need to quench that thirst if you want to keep those cards in hand. Prey can be found in the places you'll visit to give you this blood, willingly or not," Moze says, "You'll need to be careful not to drink them to death, or the Masquerade will be at risk, which is not something you want."

While your protagonists are immortal in theory, in practice there are always consequences to using their powers, so it's not wise to use them willy-nilly. You should also bear in mind that your protagonists aren't the only ones with all the gifts.

Delmas tells us, "In Swansong, the NPCs have their own character sheets, allowing them to attack or defend against the player. These elaborate mechanics enhance the combat system we had in The Council."

BOSTON LETHAL

The setting adds even more personality to the game. "We chose Boston for its clean and singular history, both in the World Of Darkness and the real city as we know it," Delmas explains. "With its cosmopolitan ambiance and its [allure], we believe that Boston could fuel some ambition if seen through the eyes of a vampire Prince."

Story utility is far from the only reason for choosing Boston. Delmas tells us Big Bad Wolf has a lot of love for the Vampire: The Masquerade tabletop role playing game, saying, "Some of us were always into it, others were able to discover the universe for the first time." Earlier she'd said, "Swansong's development was the perfect occasion for some of us to resurrect old campaigns and show them to each other, including extensions of the game."

It's not lost on us that Leysha is an anagram of her daughter's name, Halsey.

Emem must grapple with the Toreador clan curse of an obsession with beauty.

She explained, "Many of the studio members played the TTRPG based in New England, so it became obvious to choose Boston as the main city."

With the studio's obvious love of TTRPGs in mind, we had to ask her: if you could choose to be in any vampire clan, which would it be?

"Without a thought, I'd say Malkavian, as I always loved playing them," Delmas answers, "But after Swansong, I think I'd like to be a Toreador for my next campaign. I love their ambiguity towards humanity and their balance between shallowness and manipulation. They are formidable predators, nowhere to be discovered by the living."

"YOUR THREE PROTAGONISTS ALL HAIL FROM DIFFERENT VAMPIRE CLANS WITH BLOODLINE-SPECIFIC POWERS."

That certainly makes us view beautiful Toreador protagonist Emem in a new light!

The fifth edition of the TTRPG had just debuted when development on Swansong began. It introduced a fresh take on White Wolf's bloodsuckers. Delmas reflects, "There are a lot of significant changes in this vision of the World Of Darkness, especially the 'I am what I feed on' and 'hidden in plain sight' aspects. Vampires must adapt to survive and hide – maybe evolve – among the living. We thought it was really inspiring and motivating to work on this material!"

Swansong goes beyond reflecting these changes and will be considered canonical within the TTRPG's wider meta-plot. We'll live out our fanged, triple-protagonist monster mash when Vampire: The Masquerade – Swansong finally climbs out of the coffin in February 2022.

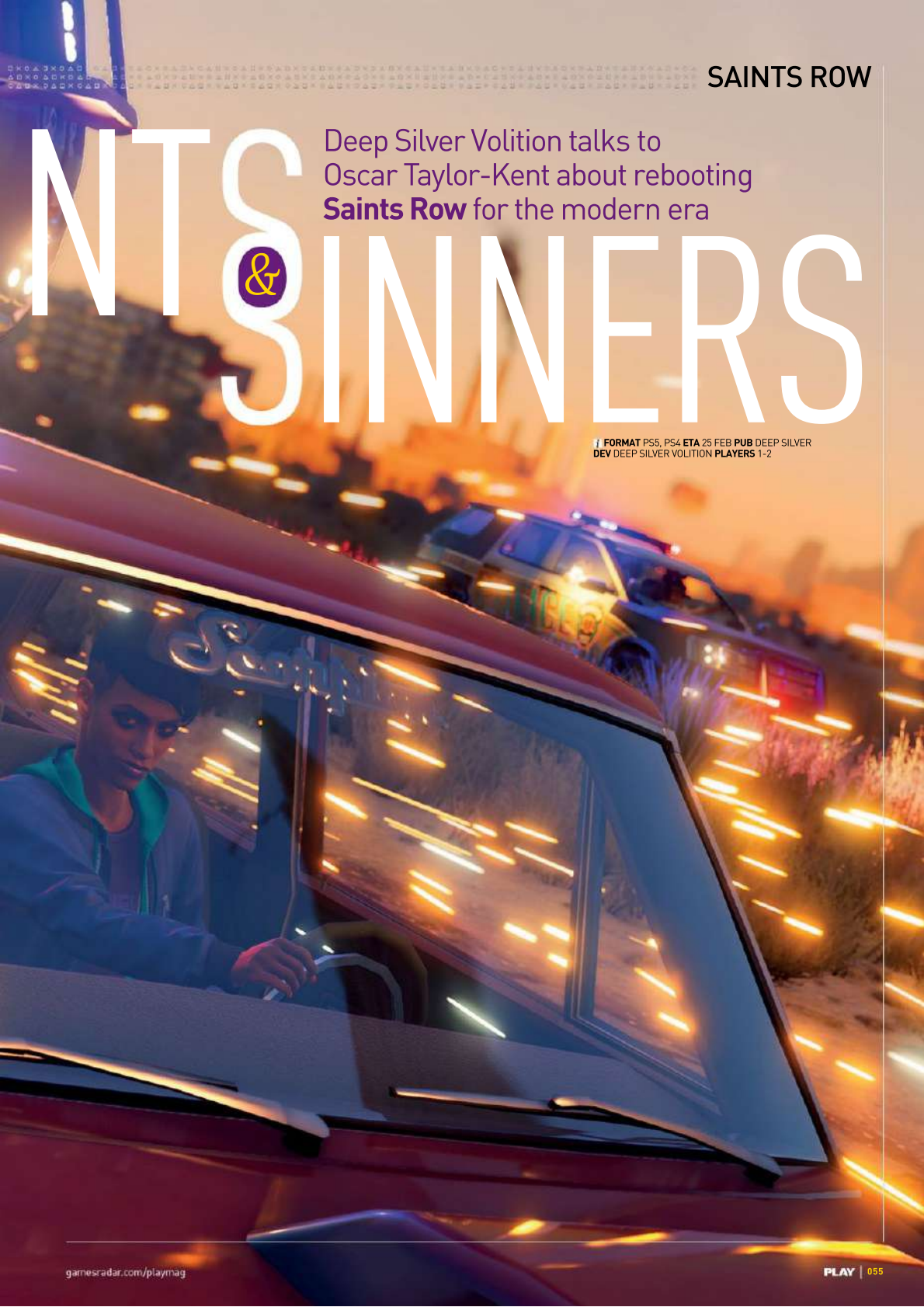
SAI

Driving has been given a big overhaul, with combat in your ride really coming to the forefront.

SAINTS & SINNERS

Deep Silver Volition talks to Oscar Taylor-Kent about rebooting **Saints Row** for the modern era

FORMAT PS5, PS4 **ETA** 25 FEB **PUB** DEEP SILVER
DEV DEEP SILVER VOLITION **PLAYERS** 1-2



When you've become ruler of the galaxy and conquered Hell itself, where can you go next? Saints Row's answer, in the form of this self-titled reboot, is 'back to the drawing board'. "It's so difficult to even think of where you would go past Saints Row 4 – ruler of the galaxy, superpowers, you're president of a planet that's been destroyed, there isn't even an Earth any more," says chief creative officer Jim Boone, as he shows us pre-alpha gameplay that already looks well-polished.

Jeremy Bernstein, who joined the team in 2020 as lead narrative designer on missions, chimes in: "I played Saints Row 4, and I thought to myself, 'Where are they going to go next? Do they take on God?' And then Gat Out Of Hell came out. I'm like 'Ah! I'm out, I'm out, I got nothing left,'" he laughs. All that was left was to rein it back in, dropping some of the baggage along the way, to create something more in keeping with Saints Row 2 or 3.

"But I do think it's important to clarify that while this is a more grounded game than Saints Row 4… it's hard *not* to be a more grounded game than Saints Row 4, honestly," continues Bernstein. "We're still going to have outrageous antics, we're still going to have lots of fun, this is not a grimdark Saints Row. This is, to me, in the writing and in the mission of the storytelling, it is very much fun first. There will be antics, there will be outrageousness, there will be comedy, there will be hijinks, there will be all of that stuff. There won't be alien invasions destroying the planet."

We're told this desperate chase through the Vegas-like El Dorado is part of a heist. Better drive fast!

He compares the approach to Moonraker, which he calls "basically James Bond in the middle of Star Wars." How do you come back from something like that? "What is the heart of this outside these trappings that have gone so far askew that it doesn't even mean anything any more? I think the only place to go when you've gone that far is to pull it back in and to get back to your roots," he says.

START UP CULTURE

Which means that once again you'll be building the Saints from scratch with a new cast of characters (take a look at Ganging Up over the page), and building your empire in a new city. The team describe Santo Ileso as the "weird west", a take on the American southwest that blends a city with the desert badlands around it. Dusty roads are lined with cacti, you can blaze down the "historic Route 66", avoid lengthy freight trains, duck around gas stations, tear it up on golf courses, explore an abandoned theme park, and win big in the Vegas-like El Dorado. Across nine districts there's plenty of variety, from relatively

FRACTURED FACTIONS

Three opposing factions control Santo Ileso. You'll need to best them all

LOS PANTEROS

For this group, every day is leg day. And arm day. And the rest of it. The members value physical power above all else, whether that's taking care of scraps with melee weapons, or using hefty guns. Considering themselves the heart of the city, they're based in an abandoned motor factory.

MARSHALL DEFENSE INDUSTRIES

This private military company literally towers over Santo Ileso, its building flaunting its wealth from the commercial district. With high-tech weapons, its members are all about precision attacks or buying their way out of problems.

THE IDOLS

With a name like that, the members of this gang could only be fuelled by the promise of fame. Anarchists, the brash and loud group is easy to spot thanks to its distinctive style, gang members throwing loud parties in and around their territory – the mansion hills of Upper Santo Ileso.

uninhabited, undeveloped areas (fortunately any vehicle can now be modded to be an offroader, even garbage trucks) to densely-populated ones, the financial districts' high-rise buildings looming large. We've seen plenty of in-game action, and it has us itching to jump into the saddle ourselves.

Three rival factions vie for power, and it's up to you to muscle in on all of them with the goal of being "self made", the game's tagline. Goofy as the hijinks may be, you're really living out the modern American Dream: you and your three partners are tired of feeling like cogs in the machine, saddled with heaps of student debt, and just want to control their own narrative.

BACK TO BASICS

To do so, you'll be tearing around the gorgeous environments, driving and shooting. While the Saints Row series started as a GTA-alike, it evolved into wacky, almost arcadey fun, and this latest iteration definitely leans into

"I THINK THE ONLY PLACE TO GO WHEN YOU'VE GONE THAT FAR IS TO PULL IT BACK IN AND TO GET BACK TO YOUR ROOTS."

Santo Ileso's streets are full of personality. And gangs. Who want to take you out.

» that. That said, there won't be any Crackdown-style superpowers as introduced in Saints Row 4, in keeping with the back-to-basics philosophy. "We love the mechanics we came up with, with all the superpowers and everything. [...] I still love just playing it and that feel," Boone says. "But there just really isn't a whole lot of runway to figure out where you would go past that, which was why it was a pretty easy decision for us to go back to our roots and do something more contemporary."

The story, too, has been refocussed to hit that contemporary target. It's still zany, and the team tease plenty of out-there weaponry, but also imply things like a certain infamous purple bat have been shelved for now. "We love those games. But we also recognise that those are games of a time. They made sense within that era, and we were able to do things that felt good back then. But that tone is not something that we feel like is something that we even want to do today," explains Boone.

It's true that, as much as we enjoy past Saints Row outings, they feel particularly of their moment. This reboot feels distinctly now. "We had a different kind of story that we wanted to tell that still has a lot of the same hallmarks, like we were mentioning with humour, and some of the over-the-top action," continues Boone.

We already love the new cast of characters and their plight, and it feels fresh. The gang of pals have an energy not dissimilar to the characters in Watch Dogs 2, but they're carrying out the sort of overblown shenanigans such as a monster truck driving over traffic, or exploding yourself to ragdoll high »

GANGING UP

Saints stick together. Meet the core team of four who kickstart your criminal empire

KEVIN

Often seen shirtless and with a digital-display mask, Kevin is a DJ who loves thrills and knows how to party. Growing up in foster care made him value genuine connections with his friends deeply, and led him on a path to find where he belongs. Like Neenah, this path led him to join another faction, The Idols, though he eventually realises that he'd rather throw in with your own gang of misfits, the Saints.

THE BOSS

And then there's you, of course. As you'd expect from Saints Row, customisation options run deep, allowing you to make someone who resembles your real-life self if you want, or to live out your dreams of being someone different. Pitch shifting might be out, but eight possible voices mean you can sound how you want to too. Your dream is that of the Saints (and the game's tagline), to be "self made", to go beyond the student debt and crushing pressure of modern life, and make something your own.

SAINTS ROW

You and your friends are the heart of the new story, forging a path for yourselves without anyone else telling you what to do.

ELI

With an MBA, Eli is something of an entrepreneur. He came to Santo Ileso, hoping to make it big in business with his own startup. He's getting his wish, but not in quite the way he imagined. A little nervous about the whole criminal thing, he's nevertheless the planner of the group, able to apply his savvy business acumen to this new path, whether he's laundering money or leveraging social media for some dodgy dealings. With his help, you can make startup culture criminally good.

NEENAH

Every gang needs a good wheel-lady, and Neenah is one of the best. She's loved cars her whole life, raised as a mechanic in her parents' garage, and is as at home burning rubber as she is fixing rides up. Like Eli, she came to the city with a different dream – to follow her love of art history and anthropology, which she studied at school. However, she has to throw in with a gang, Los Panteros, to make ends meet. In teaming up with you, she's able to feel in control of her own fate once again.

into the sky that have always made Saints Row unique. "You know, we're still a pretty bloodthirsty game, where there's all kinds of combat in it and everything," says Boone. "But, in terms of the story that we wanted to tell, it was important for us to come up with something that we felt resonated right now, not something that did maybe ten-plus years ago."

DRIVE ANGRY

That story follows a familiar formula. There are three rival factions to poke at, which you do through a combination of focussed missions and open-world activities, and you're expanding your territory and empire to earn money to pay for a bigger arsenal of weapons and larger garage of multipurpose vehicles. This is all powered by Volition's new engine, which adds a mechanical tightness to the action. It'll be easy to pick up and play, but with enough depth to keep you reaching for more things as you level up and gain XP.

"YOU'RE USING THE CAR MORE AS A WEAPON IN SAINTS ROW THAN YOU ARE USING YOUR FIREARMS."

Boone cites three movies as definite inspirations for the team: John Wick, Baby Driver, and Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw. The gunplay has gone through plenty of revision to ensure you're able to run-and-gun, staying on the move while also popping off satisfying headshots. But it's the driving model, as those last two movies hint, that has been hot-rodded the most. You can shoot out of vehicles, shoot *on* them, and even use them for combat themselves. Boone even goes as far as to say "You're using the car more as a weapon in Saints Row than you are using your firearms as a weapon. It's pretty intuitive, and it's a lot of fun to be able to do it that way." It's a big promise, but the mix of driving and shooting appears to be more seamless than anything we've seen in the genre to date.

As good as all that may be, we've done running around and driving before. Wingsuiting, however, is new, and helps with traversing that mixture of spread-out and vertical environments. You can even find places where you can launch yourself high into the air to make use of it. According to design director James Hague, all three modes of travel "are much deeper than one sentence

High-speed car chases are cool, but what if you weren't in the car, but *on* the car?

Gunplay is arcadey enough to be pick-up-and-play, while deep enough to reward skill.

gives justice to." Taking the wingsuiting as an example, "[it] integrates with combat, it integrates with vehicle upgrades, we've got an entire side-hustle in the game based on wingsuiting," he says, adding: "I think this is, without a doubt, the best driving we've had in any Saints Row game."

BUILT TO LAST

Your team of four will eventually grow the Saints into a bigger organisation, though that core cast will remain the heart of the story. You can build commercial buildings on empty lots throughout the city, unlocking new types of activity in those areas as well as NPC employees who will be hanging around. For example, building a sketchy medical clinic might unlock some insurance fraud missions, a returning fan favourite in which you try to take on a huge amount of damage for a quick payout. "I don't think we can ship a Saints Row game without insurance fraud. I think somewhere that was a rule that was written. And we love that rule," says Boone. Other ventures, both old favourites and new, will litter the world.

The freedom you have when it comes to building your empire is one of the key ways the team feel this Saints Row differs from its peers. "Each of those buildings unlocks a whole new swathe of gameplay that's associated with it, with its own rewards and its own gameplay styles, some pretty diverse mechanics that are all throughout it," says Boone. He goes on to say he can't think of any other games quite like it "in that you get to decide what buildings you want to put down, you get to decide how you want to interact with them, you don't have to interact with them if you don't want to, it's all player choice. [...] I think that players are really going to enjoy having that kind of control."

This loops round to co-op, which returns as a major feature in Saints Row (and will be playable cross-gen). The whole campaign can be completed by two players. The way you build your Saints Empire will change how the city feels, meaning when you visit your mate's version of the world it could be functionally quite different to your own. "I think [the empire building] is probably one of the biggest areas that is different, even if mechanically it's very similar in terms of driving and shooting as being primary methods," says Boone. A co-op feature revolving around pranking one another will also feature, though Volition tells us details on that will be revealed at a later date.

So, you can build your own style of criminal empire, upgrade your tools the way you want to, and explore a narrative about taking control of your destiny; Saints Row seems set to deliver on the "self made" promise. It's a fun-packed open-world crime adventure, which isn't a style of game we've seen a lot of over the past five or so years. While rumours of a remastered GTA PS2 trilogy continue to swirl, Volition's already evolving that style of all-nonsense fun. We'll find out if our prayers to the Saints have been answered come 25 February when it launches on both PS5 and PS4. ■

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GOTTA Befriend 'EM ALL

South Korean studio Pearl Abyss tells Oscar Taylor-Kent all about creating ***DokeV****, its colourful, online, monster-collecting adventure*

Having injected fresh life into MMOs with its combat-heavy Black Desert, Pearl Abyss is a studio full of ambition. Crimson Desert, its upcoming gritty fantasy adventure, is taking its genre further, blending single-player and multiplayer together within a glorious open world. DokeV [doh-keh-vee], while another multiplayer open-world adventure, is something quite different again – in this lush, vibrant cartoon near-future world, you play as a young child befriending the spirits around them.

Your customisable hero becomes able to see the titular dokebi. These are based on South Korean folkloric creatures of the same name, tricksy spirits who manifest in everyday items, not dissimilar to Japanese yokai. Because you're able to see them, you and your pals can connect with and befriend the mischievous creatures. However, that gift also means you learn some uncomfortable knowledge about the world in which you live.

GETTING CHIPPED

"DokeV is set in a world where artificial intelligence technology has developed. There is a facility called 'The Company', which produces android robots using artificial intelligence," explains lead producer Sang Young Kim. "However, the main character sees this company more like a villain as the android robots' technology comes from The Company catching dokebi and inserting them into AI chips." So far, we've seen examples of a robot going berserk on a construction site, and another on a beach made out of flotsam. "The main character, who finds out the truth of The Company's suppression of dokebi by using them as experiments, plays a role against The Company by releasing dokebi from the robots," he says.

"DOKEBI ARE BASED ON SOUTH KOREAN FOLKLORIC CREATURES OF THE SAME NAME, NOT DISSIMILAR TO YOKAI."

This is a problem, as while they can be "unintentionally mischievous" according to executive producer and Pearl Abyss founder Daeil Kim, the dokebi are an important part of the world. "They are also the biggest supporters of people's dreams," continues Daeil Kim, "which gives them their power and allows them to grow together with the people they support. Although dokebi cannot directly wield this power in the real world, they can use it to inspire strength and courage to people." While many people can't see this happening, for the kids at the heart of the story this is something they can interact with.

It's those aspirations that give DokeV's creatures life in the first place. "Dokebi are born from people's dreams. To give an example, someone dreams of

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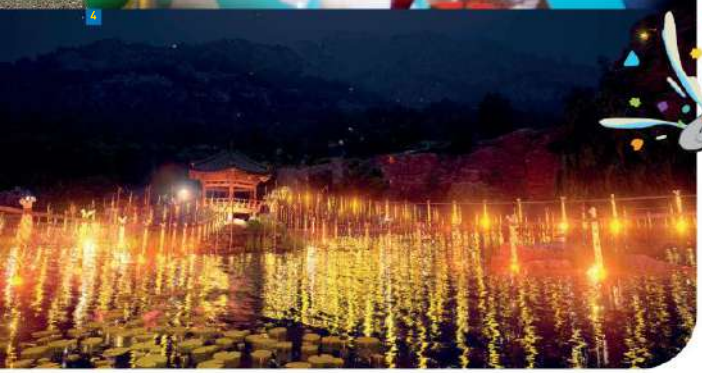

1 You can express your individuality with modern-style streetwear that celebrates South Korean fashion. 2 You don't just set polar bears with boxing gloves on bosses, you use magical versions of everyday items like umbrellas, radios, vacuums, and water guns. 3 You can express yourself by customising your room as well as your appearance. 4 There are some beautiful environments and lighting effects. Whether it's a sunny day or a night full of city lights, it's captivating.

becoming a boxer but isn't allowed to pursue that dream. The inability to pursue the dream causes the Boxer dokebi to emerge," explains game designer Changkee Nam, presumably talking about the black-and-white polar bear with boxing gloves. You obviously don't want people's dreams to be taken away and exploited by big corporations.

FRIENDLY COMPETITION

Unlike The Company, Pearl Abyss is keen to emphasise that your character doesn't actually capture any dokebi, even though the game does involve monster collecting. Instead, "[it's] about befriending them by meeting special conditions through their unique stories using information from hints about dokebi that you discover all around the town and world," says Changkee Nam. "There are some dokebi that you can befriend easily, as well as dokebi that require meeting special conditions. It'll be a lot of fun for the player to meet each dokebi to engage in their unique stories."

The way you undertake quests to befriend each individual dokebi is one element that distinguishes the game from the competition, as well as how you explore the large open world, which has a distinctly modern feel. Another distinctive feature is the way you fight. Those machines with dokebi AI won't go down easily, and you'll need to tackle them in a real-time action battle system where you need to get your hands dirty.

While the game supports solo play, these boss fights are one of the key times when you can team up with other players to take them out (though there will be competitive play that espouses the virtues of sportsmanship too). Using the dokebi, you're able to power up for the real-time fights. "Each dokebi has special skills and effects that the player puts to use and allows them to have superhero-esque powers that lets them transform into different types of »

persona," explains Sang Young Kim. How you build your character depends on the dokebi team you have to hand.

Once you've defeated a foe, you use a special vacuum cleaner to liberate the trapped dokebi from the machine. Daeil Kim describes this as being a homage to Ghostbusters ("which we loved watching," he adds). It's not the only everyday object to have a modern-day supernatural twist. Your umbrella is one of the ways you get around the open world, helping you soar through the sky.

Like the dokebi themselves, "when you use the umbrella, you hide your form and essentially become invisible," shares Sang Young Kim. "I was inspired by children who hide under umbrellas as they're playing, thinking that no-one else can see them." Before spearheading this title, he worked as director of animation and motion capture for the studio's previous titles.

Capturing that playful sense of movement and wonder seems to have been vital for this project in particular. Sang Young Kim is inspired in part by his daughter, and the things he sees on the daily school commute. He also hints at another detail, the 'Dokebi Gamtu' (Korean for 'dokebi's hat'). In folklore, it's a hat that can make you invisible.

DokeV has a distinct mix of that kind of traditional folklore and modern-day reality, and it's lovely to see a fascination with the natural world celebrated. The dokebi, like their folkloric inspirations, lean into that.

"We took inspiration from real-world natural phenomena that makes people wonder," says Sang Young Kim. "Think about rain that starts falling out of nowhere under clear, blue skies, or landspouts. Why do these things occur? What happens inside the funnel of the landspout? Curiosity about these kinds of phenomena is expressed in the game in a way where you might wonder if it was a dokebi that was doing something inside the funnel."

"YOU CAN GO JUST ABOUT ANYWHERE. YOU'LL BE ABLE TO FREELY EXPLORE THE WORLD WITH A DOKEBI SIDEKICK."

HELPING HAND

You will be free to take your DokeV journeys into your own hands. Characters are customisable, as is your own room. The type of dokebi you befriend affects your approach, but it also supports an open playstyle across the board. You're free to explore the open world in your own way, and indulge your curiosity, with your companions tagging along.

"You can just go about anywhere, really. You'll be able to freely explore the world with a charming dokebi sidekick and embark on interesting adventures," says Sang Young Kim. The environments we've seen look gorgeous, mixing realistic lighting effects with a cartoon aesthetic to create a world that can seem quite idyllic at times. "You'll meet and hear the stories of different kinds of people, [and] help them solve their problems," he continues. Helping out means playing minigames and the like, and you benefit from it too: talking to people, you gain information that helps you to track down new dokebi to add to your pool of characterful pals.

The previously mentioned umbrella is just one way you traverse the large environment. The devs confirm you're also able to zip around on skateboards and inline skates, and a trailer even shows a little toy car. The world is quite large in scale, but getting around needn't be a chore. You have the energy of a child, after all, and the excitement of the modern world to lure you on.

"Making an open world where all the characters seemed like they were living

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1 You'll encounter dokebi all over the place, and need to save plenty from being trapped inside The Company's machines. 2 Your journey takes you all across the island. It's an open world where you can explore your own way. 3 Dokebi are born from dreams, and are a mix of abstract concepts like time, and more animalistic designs. 4 Not everyone can perceive the dokebi around them, but that doesn't mean they don't need help with dokebi-related problems.

their own individual lives was challenging. In the game, we have highly interactive NPCs which will play their roles while responding to the player's actions, including running away from the player or telling their own stories," says Daeil Kim. This is far from the first open world game Pearl Abyss has developed, and DokeV is very much informed by those experiences, despite the different tone and mechanics. "What happens in an open world affects the player's actions," he continues. "As these parts become organically connected to each other, a big flow of the story is created, which has been a big challenge for us to structualise and make them into data. It wasn't easy to harmonise characters and animations in this delicate yet vast open world."

KIDDING AROUND

Ultimately the design has to capture a sense of childlike wonder, which is where the game's name came from in the first place. "As I developed the creature collection-type game, I was trying to come up with a name that reminds me of my childhood," says Daeil Kim. That was when he thought of the dokebi in the stories he'd heard as a child. That choice of central creature is a clear indication of how the studio wants this to be fundamentally different from its more mature titles. "We've been working on medieval fantasy games for a long time, but we wanted to try creating a unique experience with DokeV that could be enjoyed by the whole family," he says. We're ready to grab our umbrellas, jump on our boards, and make some friends ourselves. ■

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"HAVEN SPRINGS WORKS ITS CHARM ON YOU."

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You won't be able to get Raz's latest brain-exploring adventure out of your head

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We have to say this is one of the coolest-looking games you're going to see this year. Colt is a man with style.

EDITOR'S AWARD
PLAY

Deathloop

Round round, baby, round round

INFO

FORMAT PS5
PRICE £59.99
ETA Out now
PUB Bethesda
DEV Arkane Studios
PLAYERS 1 (plus 1 invader)
LENGTH 25+ hrs
ACCESSIBILITY Togglable subtitles with sizing option; adjustable vibration intensity; togglable headbob; audio and text language choice available

On the steps of Updaam Library, a dour block of history splashed with lurid party paint, a band plays fuzzy psych rock from inside oxygenated pods. The steady backbeat is interrupted by sudden syncopation, however – the bassy boom of a cooked grenade landing in the centre of the crowd, flinging masked revellers in every direction.

Armed to the teeth with automatic weapons, the surviving gig-goers return fire, aiming upwards at the arch of a nearby rooftop. Bullets plink against tiles and chimney stacks, but with a few clumsy dodges the culprit is able to slip away, ready to strike again from a different angle. Eventually the town's tannoy system squeals into life to address the terrorist, though the tone of the speaker is more sullen than defiant: "Thanks for ruining our show." Indifferent in their protective bubbles, the band plays on to a diminished audience.

In Deathloop you play a first-person party pooper. Living on a remote island where time repeats after 24 hours, you're part of a privileged population that gets to treat every day as a shindig with no consequences. The Eternalists fight, feast, drink their body weight in chocolate beer, and hurl themselves off cliffs just to find out what it feels like, knowing they'll wake up alive and well in the morning – since on Blackreef it's always the morning before, and never the morning after.

Yet as Captain Colt Vahn, you awake every day on the beach, met by empty beer bottles and a conviction that the loop must be broken. Colt's motivations aren't clear even to you – it's more of a feeling than a thesis – but you can certainly see why he might have a problem with Blackreef.

For one thing, amortality turns out to breed amorality. At an Updaam mansion bash dubbed the Slaughter Of The Lambs, guests perform shaky standup and, if the host deems them rubbish, they

> Speaks with the darting tongue of the FPS, but later on feels more like a deck-building roguelike.

You can turn these defences against their master, or stick a machete in the generator – whether you use cunning or brute force is up to you.

1

2

3 4

1 The soundtrack slowly heightens as the day rolls into night. 2 You don't race these. They're about the only thing in Deathloop that isn't interactive. 3 Exposition is summarised in slick, stylish cutscenes we'd happily use as wallpaper. In real life. 4 Some inexperienced swimmers just need a good kick to get them started.

fall through a trapdoor into a grinder, whereupon their pulped remains are pumped through the floor into bloody fondue fountains in an adjacent hall. Hardly humanity at its best.

LOOP DE LOOP

Moreover, something has gone wrong: every time the clock strikes midnight, the residents forget the day just gone. The Eternalists might think they're living each day like it's their last, but they're actually living their first, over and over. As a consequence, an experiment that was intended to last for just 50 years has now gone on for perhaps many times that, and shows no sign of ending.

The repercussions for Blackreef's citizens can be gnarly. Take Amador, the mask-maker in Karl's Bay who spends his morning being slowly lowered into suffocating gas during a ceremony conceived by a sinister self-help guru. Without intervention, he's doomed to die every day after breakfast for eternity. Knowing the context, this fishing-village Valhalla starts to seem less like heaven and more like the other place, situated down below.

Ending the cycle is tricky, by design. Its health is tied to eight Visionaries – the self-dubbed gods of Blackreef – and only by killing all of them can you break the loop. The good news is that on a blasted rock in the ocean there are only four habitable places the Visionaries could be: the aforementioned clifftop village, Updaam; the carnivalesque Karl's Bay; the hipster art enclave Fristad Rock; and a former military installation called The Complex. The bad news is that your targets move about, across the map and sometimes off it, and you only have four chances to get them – morning, noon, afternoon and night. The Visionaries don't hang out together as a rule (in fact, as Blackreef's one-time head of security, Colt wrote that rule) and so engineering ways to push them together is crucial.

You do have one advantage over the eternal egotists in your sights: a working memory. From the moment you first sit up in the sand, you're able to begin mapping out locations in your mind, plumbing basements and bedrooms for clues as to your targets' plans and weaknesses.

MOVING IN

If that sounds like hard work, it isn't. Anyone who's ever moved to a new town knows the process of getting to know an area. It begins with a couple of lightbulbs in the dark – the immediate surroundings of the office, or the cinema, or the gym. Then the light spreads: a journey takes you down a road where you recognise a familiar spot from a new angle, and there's a synaptic flash as you connect the places in your brain. Becoming acquainted with Deathloop's four dense, deep levels is a similar process, and you soon find your head filled with back routes and secret shortcuts that give you the jump on your enemies.

The superfly in the ointment is Julianna. She's your nemesis, in the Resident Evil sense of the word: a tracker who can show up in any level, shutter the tunnel network that lets you escape, and shoot at you from the shadows. In the PvP multiplayer that wasn't ready in time for review (check back next month for thoughts on that), others can take on Julianna's role, invading your game to take you down; if you're offline, she's instead controlled by a fairly capable AI that makes smart use of verticality to evade your field of view.

> Knowledge is the greatest power, and Julianna remembers more than anyone.

It might surprise you to discover this new and unpaid head of security was hired as Blackreef's archivist, but the job title makes perfect sense. On an island with no memory, knowledge is the greatest power, and Julianna remembers more than anyone. She's happy to wield that knowledge against you, goading you through the DualSense speaker about the gaps in your understanding, while striking at you from parts of the map you're not conscious of. Much of the curve of Deathloop is about closing that distance, so your armoury and grasp on the world match those of the sassy librarian and sniper who harries you (and is, despite the killing, your most consistent source of conversation).

All these exclamation marks are a stealth player's worst nightmare.

Colt: he lives by the maxim 'If at first you don't succeed...'

ARM'S WAY

That armoury is, by definition, extraordinary. With the help of chief scientist and murder target Wenjie, the Visionaries have crafted personalised Slabs for themselves – space-time adjacent-superpowers that make them formidable to fight, and also reflect their personalities in some fundamental fashion. Flighty game designer Charlie, a boyish Peter Molyneux-alike who codes arcade riffs on Wolfenstein 3D and Doom decades ahead of their time, flits about using a short-range teleport (in the perfect metaphor for a man unable to hold his focus in one place, Charlie has torn off a chunk of his actual brain to power his talking computer, 2-Bit). Egor, the genius inventor who spends his first day DMing his peers for attention but winds up researching alone, turns invisible. (As he sometimes yelps in battle: "I've been invisible my whole life!") When you kill them, you take on their Slabs, increasing your combat or stealth potency, and perhaps in the process learning something about the Visionary. Remember: knowledge is everything here.

Whether you get to keep that Slab is another matter. By default, when Colt dies or the day ends, you lose all your weapons and powers. But you can bank them by spending a currency called Residuum, which you gather throughout the levels or harvest from recycled items. It's a system that ensures a slow growth in power throughout the campaign: while you are forced to make tough choices about what gear to keep early on, you'll find yourself Residuum-rich before the game's end, a surplus that matches your new sense of mastery over Blackreef. Crucially, this arc doesn't dictate the order in which you collect your powers, ensuring a dramatically different early-to-mid game for every player.

Perhaps you'll make a beeline for quasi-religious leader Harriet's Nexus ability – an extra-temporal grenade that groups enemies together, so that whatever happens to one happens to all. Then you might find the Machine Affinity trinket, a totem you can socket into Colt's loadout which improves the ferocity of hacked turrets. Soon enough, through a combination of carefully selected upgrades, you've perfected a peculiar build in

1 The Eternalists daub the buildings, under the art direction of Fia Zborowska, a talented rich kid who's one of the eight Visionaries, slumming it with fellow artists. 2 Don't ask how to get him down. We still haven't figured it out – and we've made plenty of attempts. 3 Enemies patrol the map by default – they're never spawned in knowing your location. This means you can learn their routes and plan attacks accordingly.

which friendly turrets kill Nexus-grouped enemies, and you take a top up from the health of your opponents as they all fall down at once.

LOVABLE ROGUE

Though Deathloop speaks with the darting tongue of the FPS, in its latter stages it can feel more like a deck-building roguelike, as you reshuffle powers and totems from your growing pack to achieve specific goals. In one instance, we pick up a trinket that drains health for extra power, and counteract it with a regen boost – then use that cocktail to supercharge our invisibility. Sure, like this we're constantly on the verge of catastrophic blood loss and totally unfit for combat. But nobody could see us coming anyway. Deathloop's subreddit must already be stuffed with min-maxing masterclasses.

This willingness to let your priorities steer the order of Deathloop's events extends even to the game's plot. It's here that Arkane, long famed for its choice-driven stories, flexes in a way few studios can. The game collates all the information you find scouring its maps into distinct leads – a mercy, since there's little chance you'd manage to keep the many threads in your head at once. You can select any lead as your current objective, and can uncover revelations that might be third-act material in another game, should you choose to dig down in one spot.

The willingness to let your priorities steer the order of events extends even to the plot.

As with the loadouts, you eventually wind up in the same place as every other player – with access to everything, namely a full understanding of how to kill your adversaries and when. But even then there's room for variation. You can kill targets in dramatically different fashions: either by carrying out surgical stealth infiltrations, pulling off feats in the field of headshotting, or springing large-scale environmental traps.

The looping nature of the adventure forces experimentation, and the no-consequences setting encourages gunplay where Deathloop's predecessor, Dishonored 2, often made you feel guilty for resorting to violence. Arkane has developed an upgraded version of that game's combat system which forefronts mobility in a way that recalls both Far Cry and Doom Eternal, and it's a delight.

UPDAAM GOOD

Played as a straight shooter, with a handheld anti-aircraft gun pounding away on your arm, Deathloop would be first rate. Yet it's so much more. Ticking away beneath that bloody clockface are the gears of the immersive sim, the genre that birthed Deus Ex and Bioshock, in which Arkane is deeply rooted. From that origin point, Deathloop takes a principle of consistency. Yes, you can blow up a turret or hack it, but you can also pull out its battery and use it to provide power to the door of a secret room, or hurl it as a makeshift bomb. Such intricacy leads to invention, and ultimately to great, unique anecdotes that you just don't get in something like Call Of Duty. Like the time we trip up Julianna with a few chasing bullets as she hot-foots

4 In Dishonored, that grenade could be dealt with by slowing time. But in Deathloop you can't stop the clock. 5 A self-portrait by Fia. She's totally bizarre. 6 When it all kicks off, Deathloop allows you to revel in the action, and master it.

it across a rooftop in Updaam; as she falls, her bonce bounces off a gutter opposite, and the hunter tumbles into a side street Eternalists have laced with proximity mines. We bet she laughs at that explosive punchline the next morning.

It's your relationship with Julianna (or 'Jules', eventually) that keeps Deathloop from becoming dizzying. For most of its running time it's a banterous baddy-buddy comedy, funnier than Arkane has allowed itself to be before, leaning into its Hangover-with-guns conceit. Actor Jason Kelley lends Colt an endearing goofiness, with highlights including the naming of his first permanent gun ("Gunislav? Comrade Caliber!"). One gag about the 'Colt Train' comes as close to acknowledging Gears Of War as PS5 ever will.

It's just a shame that the pace of the storytelling doesn't leave room for longer pauses in contemplation; at times, we were two steps behind Colt in his realisations, most egregiously during the overly abrupt ending. This is a game that respects your intelligence, and for the most part that's a boon, but at its weakest points, it's guilty of overestimating your processing power.

Still: there's always tomorrow ("unfortunately," as Colt would add). Another chance to delve into Deathloop's layered world and emerge with a deeper understanding of a place you thought you already knew. Even the most familiar streets are different after dark, or with new company, and that's the tantalising truth that keeps Blackreef ever-refreshing.

As Arkane's been acquired by Xbox, this is its first and last PS5 exclusive. But what better parting gift than a perfect day you could happily live again and again? **Jeremy Peel**

10 PLAY

THE PLAYBOOK

WHAT YOU DO IN: DEATHLOOP

26% Slide-kicking a masked goon into the sea, as you do every morning.

8% Telling automated turrets you're their mate via the medium of radio signals.

15% Staring at all the trinkets you amassed on your latest run.

5% Sliding into the DMs of your sworn enemies to learn their secrets.

12% Sabotaging the research of a pioneering scientist in order to ruin their day.

THE DUALSENSE DIFFERENCE

SPEAKER
Julianna's voice in your controller speaker makes her the annoying wasp the developers intended.

HAPTICS
Thumps beneath your palms when running on concrete remind you just how stealthy you're not being.

HOW TO... STEALTH KILL TWO BADDIES

Grip your machete in your right hand and stick a silenced gun, such as this SMG stolen from a Visionary, in your left. Now start running at your victims and enter a slide with a squeeze of ◎. Squeeze L2 to fire your gun. Now bring the knife down with a press of R1. Hey presto, two corpses!

STATPACK

04
Levels, which doesn't sound like very many until you factor in all the permutations caused by, for starters, four possible times of day.

08
Visionaries to kill. You've gotta line 'em up just right, like self-aggrandising bowling pins, to get through every single one in a day.

02
Chances to revive yourself per map before you're dead for good, though if you manage to kill Julianna you can bag a couple more.

IS IT BETTER THAN?

YES

There's just as much engrossing mystery in Arkane's cycle, and it's far less punishing as well.

YES

Exploring every inch of a Deus Ex level can feel like an obligation. As Colt, you know you can always come back.

YES

Just. Deathloop doesn't make you feel guilty for indulging in Arkane's inspired ultraviolence.

Actress Erika Mori and singer-songwriter mxmtoon bring new protagonist Alex Chen to brilliant life.

Life is Strange: True Colors

A young adult, small-town mystery drama with plenty of heart

Alex Chen believes she is cursed. Gifted with a finely attuned sense of empathy, Alex finds herself strongly influenced by the intense emotions of those around her. After her difficult childhood within the foster care system, her estranged brother Gabe invites her to find a home in the small Colorado town of Haven Springs. Unfortunately, the curse has not yet loosened its grip.

Ditching the episodic release schedule of earlier entries, you can play through all five chapters of True Colors from the off. Rather than centring a teen cast, the drama revolves around a group of young adults and their small-town community in the wake of a tragic death. Both aspects feel like confident, forward-thinking steps for the series. Superpowers still play a central role too but they're less ostentatious and playful than Max Caulfield's time travel. That said, as Alex's power evolves over the course of the story, she's more conscientious about how she ought to use it than Max ever was.

New protagonist Alex has had to accumulate a lot of life experience very quickly and knows the difference between *could* and *should* – even if the game doesn't discuss it much. Actress Erika Mori effortlessly portrays Alex's thoughtful, observant demeanour, and singer-songwriter mxmtoon elevates an early solo jam session beyond its obvious song choice as Alex's singing voice.

INFO

FORMAT PS5 (reviewed), PS4
PRICE £49.99
ETA Out now
PUB Square Enix
DEV Deck Nine Games
PLAYERS 1
LENGTH 5+ hrs
ACCESSIBILITY Two font styles; longer choice timer; skippable quick reflex gameplay; togglable jog and power toggle; colour blindness options; brightness warning option; volume warning option; controller vibration on/off; major choice prompt option; subtitle sizing options; letterboxing options

Alex's empathy powers skew close to telepathy in practice. Sidle up to a troubled denizen of Haven Springs, hold L2 to get a whiff of their emotional aura, and then press ⊗ to hear what's eating them. Holding L2 also highlights belongings that boast a powerful emotional resonance and can offer a glimpse into the past. We often wish the game did more with the latter superpower, especially as the opening hours highlight the danger to Alex of volatile emotions and then goes on to do little with this. Instead, Alex's curse folds neatly into the narrative design which generally plays things safe beyond an early bust up.

That said, the power suits the much more grounded story. There's no supernatural storm coming for Haven Springs – instead, the uncaring, unstoppable force threatening the town is more recognisable and depressingly mundane.

> The drama revolves around a group of young adults and their small-town community.

WITH FEELING

As Alex hopes she's finally found a home, Haven Springs works its charm on you too. Rather than playing through narratively connected vignettes as in previous games, most of the action is tied to the main setting. Its central street is the most open area but ultimately the town is quite a confined space – not that Haven Springs needed to be a massive open world. As you dash between errands, you catch snatches of conversation that hint at

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1 Few choices have lasting consequences but plenty are worth mulling over. 2 Of the love interests, Ryan feels more directly tied to the narrative than Steph. 3 Haven Springs boasts community events you'll want to get involved with.

peoples' problems that Alex may be able to assist with. These side-stories evolve with each chapter. Affectionately observed, they exemplify much of the setting's charm. Seeing familiar faces crop up at Haven Springs' community events not only breathes life into the setting but also rarely fails to bring a smile to our face.

WELCOME HOME

Even so, the presentation of these easily missed moments pales in comparison to that of the major story beats. True Colors doesn't only strike the stylised balance the series' art direction has been gunning for since the start, it ices that cake with stunning facial capture and animation that more than sells many emotional closeups. Deck Nine Games is also handling the remaster of Max Caulfield's story; we say it's in good hands.

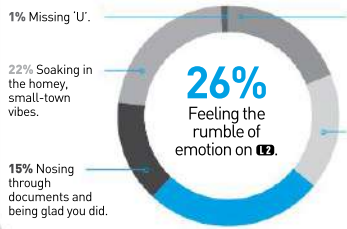
Deck Nine has woven a satisfying mystery in with a compelling character arc, tying both threads off in a memorable final chapter. We expected to tear up at some point going into this and chapter five does not disappoint. Naturally, your experience of this bookending chapter will differ slightly. The results of your choices along the way are either pleasingly expressive or will leave you wanting to mull things over – even if their consequences don't all have staying power. The narrative design often plays things safe when it comes to Alex's power but it affords a conclusion that definitely gets us right in the feels.

Haven Springs will work its charm on you. Alex Chen is easy to root for and her story is well worth playing for Life is Strange series fans and newbies alike. **Jess Kinghorn**

8 PLAY

THE PLAYBOOK

WHAT YOU DO IN: LIFE IS STRANGE: TC


1% Missing 'U'.
19% Staying true to yourself but wondering how else things might've gone.
22% Soaking in the homey, small-town vibes.
26% Feeling the rumble of emotion on L2.
17% Quietly taking pointers from Alex Chen's on-point wardrobe.
15% Nosing through documents and being glad you did.

FRIENDS & ENEMIES

STEPH GINGRICH
This geeky cutie runs the indie radio station and loves to roll dice. We love her.

RYAN LUCAN
A love interest for those who prefer the rugged, nature-loving mountain man type.

DIANE JACOBS
The human face of Typhon mining. What corporate secrets is she hiding?

STATPACK

05
Chapters. Four of them are all about the homey, small-town vibes. But be warned, at least one is sure to leave nary a dry eye in the house.

25
Memories to find. Hold L2 to see the auras of emotionally resonant objects in the environment and follow the glow. Each chapter contains five.

04
Emotions: Rage, Sadness, Joy, and Fear. Yes, that is the same number as Super Princess Peach, though the vibes are very different.

LOVING/HATING

DON'T MIND US!
Snooping through Alex's phone and journal adds so much texture to her character and the small town she finds herself in.

GETTING EMOTIONAL
Encountering only about four different moods. [This is out of mechanical necessity.] We wish the game did more with them, too.

TROPHY CABINET

BRONZE
In chapter four, help the guy in a hoodie guess the exact amount of jellybeans.

SILVER
Read the emotional resonance of this dent in the wall by the bed in Gabe's old flat.

GOLD
After slaying the 'dire wolf', read the resonance of the dollar on the ground.

The action's still good, plus you've new Ghost techniques to learn and armour to collect.

UPGRADED FOR PS5

Ghost Of Tsushima: Director's Cut

Jin up, Sony's pricey upgrade justifies its cost

INFO

FORMAT PS5
PRICE £69.99 (full game); £24.99 (PS5 upgrade)
ETA Out now
PUB Sony Studios
DEV Sucker Punch
PLAYERS 1 (story), 1-4 (Legends mode)
LENGTH 10 hrs (Iki Island), 40 hrs (full game)
ACCESSIBILITY Enhanced combat cues and wind visibility; aim assist; togglable button holds; adjustable subtitle size and backgrounds

You can't help raising an eyebrow at Sony's decision to lock PS5-enhanced features behind a paywall. With multiple options for buying Ghost Of Tsushima, from digital upgrades to a full-price physical edition, it can be confusing. But that shouldn't overshadow the fact this is the definitive edition of a great game, boosted by PS5 features.

We'll leave the politics of paying for others to fight over on message boards. So, here's why Ghost Of Tsushima: Director's Cut should be in your PS5 collection, whichever way you get there (a £24.99 upgrade or £69.99 for the full game). The game wraps its arms around the SSD and hugs the *blorp* out of it. An open-world adventure where you can fast travel *anywhere* in less than a second? That's a gift. Other features, such as 3D audio and haptic feedback come into their own; you can physically feel Jin's sword unsheathing, and the clip-clop of your horse's hooves changes in feel as you cross sand and rock. Best of all is Sucker Punch's use of the DualSense's speaker to play ambient sounds and songs, made particularly unnerving as the Eagle's nightmare visions swirl from the TV into your hands.

Which brings us to Director's Cut's biggest addition (aside from compiling the previously released free multiplayer co-op mode, Legends): the Iki island expansion. At the start of Act 2 Jin can travel from Tsushima to connect with his own tragic past, come to terms with his father's death, and confront a new Mongol enemy, a witch called the Eagle.

A CUT ABOVE

The core action remains intact, with Jin's four-stance fighting style enabling him to counter different enemy attacks, learn new Ghost techniques (your horse can now charge into groups of enemies) and take part in more minigames – calm the cats and deer of Iki with motion-controlled flute challenges. This expansion doesn't distract from Jin's main quest to oust the Mongols from Tsushima, and even presents a clever MacGuffin to reset the game's reputation-based challenges: Jin's clan is hated as its members were responsible for a previous massacre. Iki plays like a condensed version of the main game, complete with new heroes, sidekicks, and a buff-enabled armour – a monkey-pirate themed set for counter-attack enthusiasts.

There's enough fresh material to justify the upgrade fee, but more importantly Director's Cut's PS5 features offer the originality missing in the PS4 game. The result is that last year's solid adventure now feels fresher and more vital.

The PS4 original is enhanced in clever ways on PS5, and what you do on Iki island builds on the lore and ideas of the main game in clever ways. A must-play on PS5. **Ian Dean**

9
PLAY

gamesradar.com/playmag

INFO **FORMAT** PS5 **PRICE** £15.99
ETA Out now **PUB** Team17
DEV Navegante Entertainment **PLAYERS** 1

Greak: Memories Of Azur

A Greak way to play?

Good metroidvanias embody the spirit of adventure, allowing you to find joy in the act of exploring new areas and rewarding your progress with helpful abilities. Treading the line between satisfying exploration and clear navigation is a challenge, for sure, but the thrill of finding fresh locations or taking down a powerful boss with your upgraded abilities is hard to beat. It's a shame, then, that despite all the ideas brought to the table by developer Navegante Entertainment, it forgot something rather important: a functional map.

Switching between three siblings named Greak, Adara, and Raydel,[1] you're tasked with protecting a small camp from the invading Urlag creatures plaguing the land, sourcing the materials needed to build the airship the people need to reach safety. With the camp acting as a base for supplies, you journey through this gorgeous hand-drawn landscape searching for both materials for the ship and ancient relics that could turn the tide of the war against your enemies.[2] While controlling three protagonists at once is far from simple, you need to use their differing attributes to solve puzzles and find success in this dangerous land.

This all sounds great in theory, but things fall apart somewhat if you ever accidentally stray from the beaten path. The lack of a detailed map, even for areas you've already visited, makes navigation more frustrating than fun until you eventually stumble back on the intended route. And as the puzzles grow in scope as you progress, this issue becomes more stark. It's not what we'd call a dealbreaker, but it's enough of a nuisance to hold this short yet unique adventure from greatness. **Alicia Haddick**

7 PLAY

FOOTNOTES 1 You start with Greak and find the others – a nice alternative to unlocking abilities 2 A beautiful orchestral score brings life to the forests.

INFO **FORMAT** PS5, PS4 **PRICE** £15.99
ETA Out now **PUB** Annapurna Interactive
DEV Hollow Ponds, Richard Hogg **PLAYERS** 1

I Am Dead

Happens to the best of us

The adventure of Morris Lupton, museum curator in the cheery British coastal town of Shelmerston, begins with his death. Upon death, Morris becomes capable of seeing through objects, an ability he needs for his final job in the afterlife – finding a new Custodian, a ghost willing to become the island spirit and stop Shelmerston's volcano from erupting. To do that he visits places around the island and peeks into inhabitants' memories[1] to find memories of fellow deceased Shelmerstonians – people who left their mark on the community in some way.

The stories Morris learns point to items of sentimental value he then has to find. Once he's found them all, he can resurrect their since-deceased owner for a chat. Morris is joined by the (very talkative) ghost of his dog Sparky, who keeps him on track but also has a lot of amusing comments to offer.

I Am Dead combines forgiving hidden-object activity with a vibrant art style, but most importantly it's a genuinely moving story about community and human connection. Shelmerston isn't any old island, it's home to merpeople, boasts its own sport, and displays artworks by the famous Vernon Russet – a humanoid Braeburn apple. Simple but enjoyable activity aided by a fun object-slicing mechanic,[2] fantastic voice acting, and a palpable love of worldbuilding and small-town life come together to create one of the most endearing British games in recent memory. It's a cosy afternoon's worth of fun, with the wonderful power to make you appreciate lives well lived. **Malindy Hetfeld**

9 PLAY

FOOTNOTES 1 From memories of the joy of love in the face of adversity to reliving the struggles of single parenthood, each story has a lot of depth. 2 Whether you're peeling back the earth to reach a fox's den or find island spirits by slicing an object according to a picture given, action is intuitive.

INFO **FORMAT** PS5, PS4 **PRICE** £17.99
ETA Out now **PUB** Merge Games Ltd
DEV Antab Studio **PLAYERS** 1

Foreclosed

Hack through the future

Evan Kapnas is a man on the run. Recently made redundant and at risk of having his identity implant auctioned off, his only chance of solving this mess is by navigating this gorgeously cyberpunk world presented in the style of a graphic novel. Yes, Foreclosed definitely owes a great debt to other bouts of noir fiction set within a neo-futurist setting such as, say, Blade Runner or Neuromancer. What sets it apart is how it uses interactivity to mess with the form, framing what is otherwise a rather tropey tale of blood and betrayal through slick comicbook panels.

The stylish presentation almost makes up for the poor gunplay. You see, Foreclosed is best when you're sneaking around environments and avoiding shady individuals,[1] hacking nodes, and generally indulging in the type of espionage necessary to clear your name. This action-adventure unfortunately falls down whenever sequences force you into all-out gun battles in an effort to be cinematic. The third-person shooting simply isn't responsive enough to support these events, which is a problem considering combat heavily relies on Kapnas[2] using his trusty Symbiotic Pistol.

Unlocking and installing further modifications relevant to telekinesis and stealth results in a much better experience, more akin to the detective style of storytelling Foreclosed repeatedly apes. Fortunately, these opportunities do come up often, but even this is somewhat soured when you realise the checkpoint system is extremely outdated. Just cleared out a room of guys? Prepare to do it again if you fail at the last hurdle. Foreclosed nails its sense of style and world-building; both are enjoyable if you can get past the middling gunplay. **Aaron Potter**

7 PLAY

FOOTNOTES 1 Get close and you can overheat a foe's head chip to take them out quietly. 2 Kapnas' voice actor is appropriately gruff. Get him a Hall's Soother!

Aliens: Fireteam Elite

Show us everything... oh

INFO

FORMAT PS5
PRICE £34.99
ETA Out now
PUB Focus Home Entertainment
DEV Cold Iron Studios
PLAYERS 1-3
LENGTH 6 hrs (campaign)
ACCESSIBILITY Adjustable subtitle size and HUD info; colour blind mode; ADS mode

Remember the moment when Ripley straps half the Colonial Marines' arsenal into one overpowered, flame- and bullet-spewing weapon at the end of Aliens? Then collages explosives, ammo, and flares to herself, wipes sweat from her brow and goes gun-crazy on the Xenomorphs? That mood is Cold Iron Studios' shooter.

In respect of making us feel like an overpowered Colonial Marine whirring through countless clips of explosive ammo as swarms of xenomorphs crack and spew acid, Aliens: Fireteam Elite salutes us, chews a cigar, and grins broadly. But there's little in here that you haven't experienced before in similar team-based horde shooters.

The setup plays into Aliens' lore neatly: the action is set 23 years after the initial film trilogy came to an end in a furnace. The xenomorphs are a known entity and the Colonial Marines have become adept at suppressing them. You're sent to a research facility to uncover why the scientists have gone silent, how the xenomorphs got loose, and what mysteries the planet below holds. It means the developer can tease fans with Weyland Yutani conspiracies, introduce Prometheus' Engineers, and more.

GAME OVER?

But you haven't come for the fan-friendly lore drops, you're here to blow chunks out of killer creatures. The moment-to-moment action is fairly standard – run to a room, prep your defences using unlocked gun turrets, mines, and special ammo and wait for a door to be unlocked or a panel hacked as you pepper the swarms of xenos with hot lead. It's a structure you've played before in World War Z and other survival shooters.

What saves Aliens: Fireteam Elite is its devotion to the licence. The xenos attack in ways zombies can't – scurrying along walls, up and above you on the ceiling, from below, and via vents. You have to dodge unique drones and larger armoured beasts or tackle them in different ways. And so it's a shame the xenos are dropped in the final third for *cough* zombies and the game drifts too close to being stale. Thankfully the final act and a Queen assault is worth the entrance fee. If this shooter fails to be original it at least captures the organic, Giger-inspired tunnels of Ripley's Aliens rescue.

Between missions you can tinker with loadouts and jigsaw together mods (mixing attack and defensive add-ons offer bonuses). It's enough to hold your attention but like much of the game rarely goes far enough to feel new or different. You will love the whizz of the Pulse rifle and the other Aliens-perfect moments, but the game around them is sadly lacking.

> There's little in here that you haven't experienced before in team-based horde shooters.

This online-focussed squad shooter recreates the feel of the Aliens movie perfectly but rarely gives us something original to do with all that pitch-perfect fan service. **Ian Dean**

6 PLAY

INFO **FORMAT** PS5, PS4 **PRICE** £49.99 (PS5), £44.99 (PS4) **ETA** Out now
PUB Nacon **DEV** Kylotonn **PLAYERS** 1-2 (offline), 2-8 (online)

WRC 10 The Official Game

Here's looking at you, skid

Games with yearly updates, like Kardashians, always tend to look the same. There might be a facelift, but it can be hard to tell one from another. The latest entry in *this* series, however, manages to differentiate itself from its relatives in (mostly) positive ways that go further than a more user-friendly top menu.

That official WRC licence continues to be put to good use, with more official cars, tracks, and drivers than you can shake a gearstick at. This includes the new Estonia, Croatia, Belgium, and Spain rallies, and, in celebration of the WRC's 50th anniversary next year, there are more historic rallies than ever.

Moment-to-moment play, meanwhile, has been sharpened so that it's the best it's ever been. The physics, which last year had a few holes, have been improved enough to prevent you having to worry about the rare occasions when your car seems to flip over a pebble. The engines don't even sound like angry washing machines any more!

FORD THE PLAYERS

Co-drivers have been injected with more personality. Complete a sector in particularly good time and they'll yell in triumph; veer off track or crash, and they'll react with surprise, concern, or – amusingly – sarcasm. You can switch off the comments, but we love 'em.

It's not all good news on the changes front, though. There's a 120fps mode for fancy screens, but otherwise we recommend sticking with Balanced visuals. Using the High-Fidelity mode offers only a minor upgrade, and the price is a major hit to the framerate and odd blurring. Even sticking to Balanced, using a third-person camera can sometimes lead to frame drops and even brief screen tearing. It doesn't ruin the experience, but it's disappointing to see in a racer. At least you can still pick your own name in Career mode. Just ask our driver Walter Rally and co-driver Spanish Amanda.

In celebration of the WRC's 50th anniversary next year, there are more historic rallies than ever.

Although the framerate has taken a step backwards, everything else is as good as, or better than, before. A rally racing experience that doesn't disappoint. **Luke Kemp**

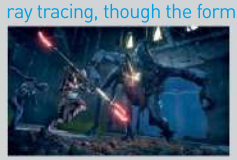
8 PLAY

BANDWIDTH

PS4-to-PS5 game updates chewed on

PS5 continues to enhance gaming experiences in a very real way. This time we're only spotlighting one full native upgrade (which we've been waiting for for quite a while), plus two open worlds that have bespoke PS5 patches that double the framerate to 60fps.

Months after the game was released on PS4, we've finally got the proper PS5 version of **Little Nightmares 2**. The game was always pencilled in for the new-gen console, and it is indeed the better version if you've been able to wait. Even if you haven't, the game is short enough and atmospheric enough to be worth a replay (it's a free upgrade too, so won't cost you any extra). New particle effects, volumetric shadows, and ray-traced reflections add a lot to the tone, as does a 3D audio soundscape if you want to feel a chill down your spine. As is often the way, you have two visual modes to pick from – Beauty mode runs at 4K/30fps, and Performance mode at dynamic 4K/60fps. Both feature ray tracing, though the former has more of it.



Next, kicking off a couple of pretty notable PS5 patches for PS4 games is **Assassin's Creed Odyssey**. Would you rather sail across the Greek islands than journey across foggy, soggy olde England as a Viking? Fair enough. Load up 2018's Assassin's Creed outing on PS5 and you'll be able to adventure around the beautiful blue Aegean at 60fps, double the original framerate. It's particularly nice to have enhancements like this in an open-world game, as the more responsive movement adds greatly to your sense of freedom. Sneaking around enemy camps and stabbing bad guys in the neck (and other vulnerable areas) has never felt this immersive.

Similarly, **Horizon Zero Dawn** has received a hefty upgrade on PS5. For those disappointed in Horizon Forbidden West's delay to 18 Feb 2022, the bump up to 60fps in the original game provides a good excuse to revisit the post-apocalyptic world. As in Assassin's Creed Odyssey, the open world really benefits from the extra responsiveness, but it really assists with Horizon's unique style of combat too. Some of the larger battles against the robotic animals can get quite tense as you juggle shooting weak points and laying down traps for bonus damage. Doubling the possible framerate really makes those skirmishes come alive.

Psychonauts 2

Welcome to our mind palaces

INFO

FORMAT PS4
PRICE £49.99
ETA Out now
PUB Xbox Game Studios
DEV Double Fine
PLAYERS 1
LENGTH 7+ hrs
ACCESSIBILITY Invincibility mode; togglable fall damage; easier combat; customisable subtitles/font; colour blind modes; adjustable camera shake and sensitivity

For us, it's been a little over 15 years since circus runaway Razputin Aquato foiled a plan to steal brains at his psychic summer camp, earning the recognition of his revered heroes, the Psychonauts. But for Raz it's only been a matter of days, this brand-new adventure picking up just moments after PSVR spin-off Rhombus Of Ruin. Reading fans' minds, Double Fine delivers a game that's more of the same, with modern tweaks that stumble a little on the high dive.

Despite the backing from Xbox Game Studios, Psychonauts' superpowered origins are in crowdsourcing. The original's a cult classic, after all, uniquely mixing bouncy, psychic-powered platforming with creative level design inspired by the studio's adventure-game-making origins.

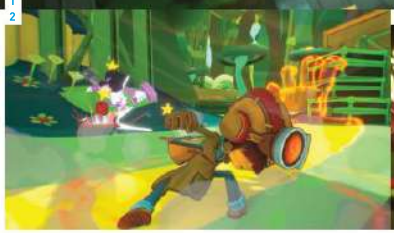
That might be why so much of Psychonauts 2 feels familiar. Fans put their money where their mouths were to get the levitation ball rolling, and so it needed to be true to the original. For the most part it's a success, though it's carrying some baggage that perhaps could have been jettisoned.

THINKING CAPS

The story picks up without missing a beat. Raz returns to The Motherlobe, the Psychonauts' HQ, having rescued Grand Head Truman Zanatto from being kidnapped (expect plenty of brain-related puns throughout – the script is as sharp and funny as you'd expect from Double Fine). Diving into kidnapper Dr Loboto's brain, it quickly becomes apparent the plot was only the beginning of a scheme to infiltrate the Psychonauts and revive Maligula, a water-wielding psychic defeated by the original Psychic Six many years ago.

Palmed off into the intern program, Raz has to put in work to convince his superiors to let him help investigate the threat. Cue lots of brain

Every mind you explore has a unique visual style, and feels like an adventure in and of itself.



1 Memories of first date at a bowling alley turn into a New-York-styled germ apocalypse. 2 Combat is a bit clunky, though you can make it easier in the options. 3 This food-themed gameshow has you jumping around the level, preparing all sorts of ingredients under a time limit.

hopping. Psychonauts is a collectathon platformer, but one where each world is literally inside someone else's mind. Even when you're not inside someone's brain the somewhat surreal cartoon art style sings, having translated to high-definition marvellously. Inside the minds, though, it's next-level. Each environment is incredibly creative, whether that's the glowing neon of a hospital-turned-casino or a psychedelic pseudo-Woodstock, or even the grimy Manhattan-like streets of a germ civilisation (connected via ten-pin bowling lanes, of course).

MIND OVER MATTER

Quirky as they are, these levels are more than zany for zaniness' sake, they're abstract manifestations of the consciousness you're in. Sometimes this is explicit as part of the main narrative, but at other times it can be hands-off, leaving the metaphors to speak for themselves.

The more you soak it in, the more you'll get out of every area, which tell complete stories about the past. As funny as the script is, this isn't a game that shies away from heavy themes, and each mind has some nasty memories locked away (and sometimes gruesome body horror, like a dentist's mind having plenty of creepy teeth). Tackling these means using psychic powers to battle with the likes of censors, doubts, and panic attacks (as the game says, they can come out of nowhere, teleporting around). You use psychic mental mind slaps, pyrokinesis, PSI blasts, and more to deal with them. New powers, like a time-slowing bubble and a spruced-up version of telekinesis, join those from the first game.

Nonetheless, combat is where the game falls from the trapeze, due to the clunky way powers are mapped on the controller. Four can be used at once, each attached to a shoulder button (one more than could be used in the first game). Yet there are eight powers, and enemies are especially vulnerable to specific ones, not to mention some powers are necessary for traversing platforming sections. Changing which ones are linked to your controller requires holding the D-pad to pause and bring up a power wheel, then remapping to the button of your choice. It's a pace-killer and can get confusing, a headache holdover from the first game that needed a better solution.

BRAIN TRAINING

Odd pacing returns too, and is perhaps slightly worse this time around, funnelling you into a lengthy endgame about halfway through, stopping you from exploring the hefty hub filled with interesting side-quests and collectibles (it's nothing revolutionary, but involves some neat extra platforming nevertheless). Fortunately you can mop up everything you missed after the credits.

Despite being teased as campmate equivalents early on, your fellow interns feel pretty underdeveloped too. A shame, as the almost heist-like missions in which each psychic helps pull off a plan are delightful, though perhaps they

A collectathon platformer, but one where each world is literally inside someone else's mind.

gamesradar.com/playmag

4 Expect dream logic, like this burping bulb that gets rid of water temporarily. 5 Make mental connections to grapple to far-off points. 6 Boss fights aren't particularly fun, but they're inoffensive, some body horror aside.

could be developed more fully in the future.

Not all minds are made equal, either. Level length varies widely. Sometimes this leads to great moments, like when you have to dive into three separate aspects of a character's mind, each a short but sweet challenge, to reunify them, but sometimes they spin the wheels. There's no joy to be had in a single boss fight either (unless fighting your despair at solving problems with violence is the real boss fight).

While some levels are creative – an '80s-themed cooking game show, for instance, or a small world you sail around entering beached alcohol bottles – they never quite reach the level of mechanical creativity of the first game, like the disguise-laden fan favourite Milkman Conspiracy level. This isn't a huge problem. After all, this time the platforming feels much more responsive, so can be leant on more. The floatiness has been dialled back a bit, while keeping the fluidity of Raz's circus-inspired flips and psychic ball running. New moves like a memory chain grapple make navigating areas easier than ever, too. It's a joy to control.

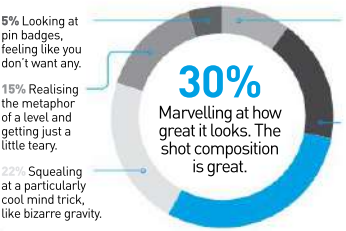
This might disappoint some fans expecting to be wowed by constant novelty once again, but even when painting within the Psychonauts lines it's endlessly more creative than the likes of Balan Wonderworld (which this reviewer *did* still like). Gorgeous visuals and shot composition, a gripping yarn, and excellent platforming prove Aquato still has the ol' Raz-zle dazzle.

Held back by some clunky controls and combat, this is a joy to play and a deserving, if somewhat less novel, successor. A truly mind-full delight. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**

8 PLAY

THE PLAYBOOK

WHAT YOU DO IN: PSYCHONAUTS 2



5% Looking at pin badges, feeling like you don't want any.

15% Realising the metaphor of a level and getting just a little teary.

22% Squealing at a particularly cool mind trick, like bizarre gravity.

10% Feeling the buzz of nabbing a collectible give way to little sense of reward.

18% Groaning, facing waves of enemies, slowly reassigning powers every few seconds.

LOVING/HATING

BIGGER ON THE INSIDE
Playful level geometry delights, from changing gravity and size to instant portals to elsewhere. Works great on PS4.

KING PIN
Power upgrades and pin badge buffs feel pointless. Bar a couple of movement upgrades, you won't use them.

STATPACK

02
Half-minds make a whole new slot of health. You'll always have half a mind – just find the other to complete it and get that slot.

33
Pin badges to collect, though annoyingly you can only equip three at a time. And the appeal of collecting every last one does wane fairly quickly.

13
Minds to explore and make well again. Some of them are much longer and have more to dig into than others, but they're all beautiful.

FRIENDS & ENEMIES

OTTO MENTALLIS
The Psychonauts' genius inventor. Operates a shop and wants your psitanium.

HOLLIS FORSYTHE
Risk-averse acting head of the 'nauts. Can Raz convince her to let him help?

SASHA NEIN
This suave spy and his brain tumbler return, allowing you to revisit cleared levels.

IS IT BETTER THAN?

YES

Both are journeys through the mind, but Psychonauts does it better in every respect.

YES

Another throwback collectathon, but Psychonauts is tighter in terms of controls and level design.

YES

Crash has nice-looking levels, but rarely do the looks add to the action like in Psychonauts.

INFO **FORMAT** PS5, PS4 **PRICE** £15.99
ETA Out now [PS5; PS4 coming soon]
PUB PQube **DEV** Dual Effect Games **PLAYERS** 1

Tormented Souls

Horror in the hallways

Returning to a genre's roots has been the inspiration for many a retro-inspired title, and this is no different. Indeed, developer Dual Effect makes it clear before you even hit the title screen that this game is designed to be a 'return to classic survival horror'. While the studio certainly achieved that goal, though, that's not necessarily a good thing.

The tropes are all here! Fixed camera angles and an abandoned mansion-slash-hospital are deliberate callbacks to the original Resident Evil as you take control of Caroline Walker, visiting this deathtrap after receiving a mysterious, blood-soaked Polaroid of twins in the post. Everything from the fact you can't move while using a weapon to the menu design and puzzles are almost exact replicas of those in the titles which inspired it.

That's just the problem. Because the formula's so tightly adhered to, nothing about this experience offers anything that a veteran won't have seen before. Even the flaws of the classics remain, with limited save opportunities a particularly egregious issue when your first chance to save doesn't come until 45 minutes in and any death forces you to restart from the beginning.[1]

Admittedly, it is refreshing to see this classic style of game brought back to modern consoles, and some players may even appreciate the way this feels like an at-times-terrifying '90s throwback. But even if you can look past its unoriginality, the lack of polish in stiff voice acting, character animation, and numerous bugs break the immersion.[2] Retro revivals are cool, but if a game brings nothing new to the table and ends up worse than the existing ones it'll inevitably be compared to, you may as well just dust off the old PlayStation and play those instead. **Alicia Haddick**

5 PLAY

FOOTNOTES 1 The number of times you can save is also limited. **2** A perfect example are the pre-rendered cutscenes that look worse than real-time action.

INFO **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £34.99
ETA Out now **PUB** Sega
DEV Sega **PLAYERS** 1-2

Sonic Colors: Ultimate

Lighting a fire under your shoes

Originally locked to Nintendo Wii, it's great to see a remaster that takes standard-definition graphics and converts them into HD. And what a game to pick. Wild colours and vibrant vistas abound, as the villainous Dr Eggman has created an intergalactic theme park by chaining together planets and kidnapping their inhabitants. Worlds unlock simultaneously, meaning you can decide for yourself when to zoom through a neon space armada or take in the greenery of Planet Wisp.

Those wisps form the gimmick of the game. Once unlocked in a stage, they populate as a powerup throughout all of them, allowing Sonic to temporarily transform his movement beyond running and jumping. Spikes for instance, allows you to stick to walls, whereas Drill has you blow right through them (soft ones, at least).[1] It means replaying levels can be genuinely transformative.

It's a mix of almost on-rails boost-based 3D sections with more classic-feeling 2D fare. The physics in the latter are still rough, with a particularly sticky-feeling jump. But Colors isn't afraid to slow down for the occasional platform challenge. Each of the six stages in the five worlds is super-quick too, focussed on one core idea through each one.[2] More often than not, Colors is a blast (though the meandering ending is awful). **Oscar Taylor-Kent**

7 PLAY

FOOTNOTES 1 They've returned in the occasional game since, but are most inventively used here. They slow things down, but as they're all based around alternate movement, fit the pace. **2** Each level is accompanied by a fantastic soundtrack. Each world has its own musical motif, spiralling out into a separate rendition for each level.

INFO **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £54.99
ETA Out now **PUB** Koch Media
DEV 1C Entertainment **PLAYERS** 1

King's Bounty II

Hardly fit for a king

Most tactical RPGs tend to not give the latter half of this genre blend its due. Sure, using different character types to take down enemies in turn-based fashion is fun, yet few capitalise on what it truly means to build up the status of your protagonist or main party of heroes. Not so in the case of King's Bounty II, a sequel which focusses on its character-driven story just as much as strategy. The fact both aspects are balanced should elevate it well above its peers, but uneventful battle animations and poor technical performance hold it back.

At least the foundation for combat is solid. Rather than take part in battles yourself as one of three selectable heroes, your duty is to guide your squad to victory from afar whenever danger presents itself.[1] The joy in this comes from being able to combine the skills of, say, spearmen and archers with a pack of hungry wolves or an undead skeleton army. The ability to have such an eclectic mix of troops fight together is a great hook. It means it's possible to alter your strategy wildly when making key tactical decisions across the hexagonal grid. But sadly the wildness doesn't go as far as the visuals – if only these skirmishes played out a little more cinematically.

Battles present a good amount of challenge from the off, too. You constantly have to weigh up which troops to recruit and swap in depending on the enemy you face. Sadly, while both the combat and character work are decent,[2] the PS4 version of the game struggles with framerate at almost every camera turn – to the point that it never stops being a distraction. King's Bounty II simply lacks much of the visual flair and polish we've come to expect from modern high-fantasy epics. **Aaron Potter**

5 PLAY

FOOTNOTES 1 The one way your character can affect battles is through one-time use spells. **2** King's Bounty II gives off Witcher vibes outside battles.

Want to get out of something? This can lay you out for a whole day.

Fracked

A slippery slope

INFO

FORMAT PSVR
PRICE £34.99
ETA Out now
PUB NDreams Ltd
DEV NDreams Ltd
PLAYERS 1
LENGTH 5 hrs
ACCESSIBILITY Adjustable comfort and movement settings, and player height; seated or standing modes; subtitles; hard-of-hearing options

Nothing is more beautiful. Gleaming white, crisp, and polished, it's a thing of beauty. We embrace it, hold it close, and welcome its perfect curves and edges. No, not the cel-shaded snow of Fracked but the toilet at PLAY Towers. It's our new best friend. An hour spent in NDreams' new eco-Bond shooter will make you appreciate your bathroom.

We're not exaggerating, Fracked really will make you feel sick. Not just in the moment but for hours after you put the game away. This shooter is VR aversion therapy. The more we play, the more we never want to slip Sony's headset on ever again. The sight of a PSVR setup makes us queasy.

The problems stem from the dev's ambition: this is an all-action, fast-paced, Bond-like shooter (think Cliffhanger meets Jason Bourne) that blends together all the systems and actions we've come to love in PSVR, but without the care to keep your stomach from turning over.

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

The opener sees you grab a pair of skis and jump down a mountain. As the action escalates (oh, there's now an avalanche to outrun) the pace increases and so, unfortunately, does the motion sickness. Controls are simple: lean into turns, and there's nuance here to pivot into realistic carving. It's fun. Or it would be if your lunch weren't gurgling up… These slope-sessions drop between shootouts and eventually increase in intensity – machine-gunning skidoo enemies and taking down sniper towers sees the screen explode around you. It's all incredible, on paper. Sadly, in practice it's uncomfortable, hot, and sweaty. *Gurgle.*

The shooting stages fare a little better. Here you can control the pace and hold back or increase the action at will. Arena-style shootouts hold your attention as you survive waves of enemies. A neat cover system – one hand holds crates, walls, and barriers, enabling you to pull yourself up from behind them or duck into them – means you can slow the game down, hide from enemy fire, and pop out for kills. It's reminiscent of PS1's Time Crisis.

It's all incredible, on paper. Sadly, in practice it's uncomfortable, hot, and sweaty.

The physicality of the game is its defining edge, with climbing interludes, moving hand-over-hand to scale rocky ledges, linking arenas. Some of these skills can be employed mid-gunfight, too. It's not uncommon to run from a platform, zip-line to another, shooting exploding barrels as you fly. It's exhilarating, and we wish it didn't make us ill.

Fracked feels like a grand failure. It looks great and features inventive uses of PSVR, but it's also a throwback to the bad old days of virtual reality when motion sickness was common. There are reasons to play, but do so at your own risk.

Has all the hallmarks of a PSVR hit – great ideas, action, and visuals – but playing it will make you feel ill. Even seasoned PSVRers should play with caution. **Ian Dean**

4 PLAY

INFO **FORMAT** PS5 **PRICE** £19.99
ETA Out now **PUB** Dear Villagers
DEV Phigames **PLAYERS** 1

Recompile

It's all gone Tron

Although it's slightly reductive to say that in this game you play as a little person running around inside a computer... well, you are, and the system is run by a rogue AI that you need to shut down. What this means in practical terms is playing a metroidvania platform shooter. A rather flawed one, sadly.

One of Recompile's main problems is that it takes far too long for movement to become fun rather than frustrating. Eventually you'll have infinite mid-air jumps, a glide, and then a jetpack at your disposal. But before you reach that point – which comes when the game is almost over – the platforming often demands a precision that the controls simply don't deliver. It's far too easy to wander down the wrong path or miss the right one, too. For at least the first half of the game, progress can feel like far more of a struggle than it should.

It's a shame, because chunks of the adventure are great fun. The bosses, while few in number, are well designed. They're challenging to fight without ever feeling unfair, and very satisfying to defeat. A few of the logic gate puzzles make you feel terribly clever when you solve them,[1] and environments are compact enough to encourage you to chase those optional collectibles. There are even multiple endings, earned and delivered in an interesting way.

Nonetheless, Recompile ultimately isn't as tightly designed as a metroidvania needs to be in order to be enjoyable, something best summed up in the fact that at least one fundamental upgrade is actually *missable* – something we discovered the (very) hard way.[2] There's a good time to be had in this visually striking virtual world, but you'll have to work hard to defrag it. **Luke Kemp**

6 PLAY

FOOTNOTES 1 Assuming you don't just hack through the circuits. **2** Hours later, when we were unable to activate a portal and had to backtrack a *very* long way.

INFO **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £19.99
ETA 23 Sep **PUB** Curve Digital
DEV Muse Games **PLAYERS** 1-4

Embr

Capitalism's fires burn forever

Step into the shoes of someone who's going to become a firefighter. Not a normal one, but one working in a world where capitalism means emergency services have basically been replaced by Uber.

You start with a five-minute lesson in how to save people (usually by yeeting them off of tall buildings onto a mattress[1]) and put out fires. It's not what anybody would call an acceptable level of training, but it's what you get, and we've all had jobs where we had to figure it out as we went along.

With that behind you, you now get to take on job after job where you go to somewhere that's a little bit on fire, try to stop the people inside becoming skeletons, maybe put out some fires, and probably try to steal some money too because the pay is appalling.

The deeply comedic gameplay of Embr perfectly fits the utterly absurd concept, and the distracted and apathetic way many of the denizens of the world react to life-threatening situations helps keep things incredibly light, even when you do miss the mattress with a client and they instantly become a bag of bones.[2]

Throw in co-op multiplayer, which only makes things more hectic, along with the ability to slow down how quickly fire spreads, which allows for a less stressful experience, and you can fight fire with friends.

In its light-hearted depiction of the dangers of capitalism, Embr is both intensely good fun and also slightly unsettling. Balancing the two moods is tricky, but it does it well, and this is an excellent companion to other chaotic multiplayer games. **Jason Coles**

7 PLAY

FOOTNOTES 1 Aiming is awkward on purpose here, and you'll need practice to safely deliver your clients (especially if you want them to give you a good rating after they've hit the mattress). **2** Not an actual bag, mind you, but a skeleton with a surprisingly wide grin, which is almost more disturbing.

INFO **FORMAT** PSVR **PRICE** £19.99
ETA Out now **PUB** Schell Games
DEV Schell Games **PLAYERS** 1

I Expect You To Die 2: The Spy & The Liar

You'll come back for Moore

Have you ever wanted to be a secret agent? Then you'll love playing out certain aspects of the James Bond lifestyle in VR[1] here. With a sense of humour that sits somewhere between 1970s tongue-in-cheek Bond and Austin Powers farce, you'll get to solve puzzles and outsmart villains with the best of them.

It doesn't matter if you missed the first game. All you need to know is that your enemies know you as The Phoenix as you were presumed dead, and it's your job to continue to be hard to kill. The PS Move controllers allow for a pleasing level of interactivity with the world, and telekinesis allows you to grab and move objects at any distance, meaning that space and detection issues are almost nonexistent.

It's a seated experience with very little in the way of guidance, but this is no Statik-style hardcore puzzler. It usually takes us a few goes to complete a mission, but we work out what to do eventually,[2] and often feel cool doing it. The final two missions are wonderful, including an improvised escape and the defusing of nuclear warheads.

Death means restarting a mission from scratch. That's understandable – there are only six, and each probably averages about five minutes played flawlessly – but it can sometimes be frustrating. Once you've seen the credits, speedruns and missed collectibles tempt you back. If that's not your thing, there are optional interactions and alternate solutions to explore; but you'll have more or less seen everything there is. Great spy-flavoured fun while it lasts, though, and don't forget your headset – it's VR eyes only. **Luke Kemp**

8 PLAY

FOOTNOTES 1 We know what you're thinking, and no, not *those* aspects. **2** Apart from the fourth mission, where there's a missable hint. Try on all the masks!

gamesradar.com/playmag

INFO **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £19.99 **ETA** Out now
PUB Humble Games **DEV** Pocket Trap **PLAYERS** 1-2

Dodgeball Academia

Dodgeball is life

Take the hyperactive protagonist of a sports anime like Haikyuu!!, some bold colours, cartoony character design and add some seriously engaging real-time dodgeball combat and you've got yourself Dodgeball Academia, a funky little gem of a game. Here, protagonist Otto finds the place of his dreams – a world where everything can be settled with a dodgeball match.

But he isn't alone. On Dodgeball Academia's big, brightly coloured campus a host of friends and foes await, students who love dodgeball just as much as he does and are always up for a match. We weren't exaggerating when we said almost everything gets settled by a match, but fortunately the dodgeball matches are genuinely fun. In real-time battles, you have to pick up balls and, well, throw them at your opponent, and time your catches right to avoid damage. With multiple balls in play, different throwing styles and eliminated opponents throwing from the back of the court, this takes an astounding amount of concentration. Main characters can also unleash powerful special attacks, because while Dodgeball Academia may look like a Sunday-morning cartoon, it's all anime inside.

You can play a quick match with friends in local co-op, but the game's campaign is its real strength. There isn't much of a narrative per se other than Otto enjoying everyday school life (and boy, does he enjoy it), but a large cast of lovingly designed and animated characters and some enjoyable writing are great motivators to become the very best (like no-one ever was), which is arguably missing if you just throw some balls around in a versus match, especially since characters unlock in versus mode after you've met them in the story, eliminating the surprise of what new moves you'll face. From great accessibility options to a combat that's easy to pick up but takes some finessing to learn, Dodgeball Academia is a well-designed game that delivers the simple joy of a good cartoon – it isn't deep, but it sure feels good.

A host of friends and foes await, students who love dodgeball just as much as Otto does.

From great art to fun combat and a truly unique idea for something that isn't a sports game, Dodgeball Academia scores a lot of goals. Get on this court. **Malindy Hetfeld**

8 PLAY

THREE TO PLAY

PSN games you might have missed

Every month, loads of games come to the PS Store, and you'd be hard-pressed to play them all. We take a look at some that didn't quite make the cut this month to give our impressions. This issue we get acquainted with cute critters, from kitty cats to mythical beasts.

This action adventure RPG is like catnip for me! **Kitaria Fables** has it all: magic, dungeoneering, and, most importantly, gardening! Venturing to Paw village it's up to you (or you and a co-op friend) to protect its denizens from the increasingly aggressive wildlife. In class-free, real-time combat you can mix and match your offensive approach, even going on to befriend some of the cute animals who are creating trouble at the edge of town. When you're not tackling rogue animals, there are villagers to help out, weapons and other loot to craft, and crops to tend in this purr-fect advent-nya. Though I may be slightly biased in favour of this one, I make no apologies for those paw-ful puns.

From cute and cuddly to sharp and deadly, it's time to take a hard left. In PSVR title **Arashi: Castles Of Sin**, you play as stealthy assassin Kenshiro. Along with your spymaster cousin Ayane and lupine animal companion Haru, you're tasked with reclaiming castles captured by an infamous band of bandits, the Six Oni Of Iga. Under cover of darkness you can pick off bandits from afar while Haru goes in for the kill, or you can get up close and personal with a slew of melee weapons yourself. With plenty of indirect options, such as smoke bombs or even the environment itself, at your disposal, this is a sneaky mission with few dull moments.

Moving from castles to the forest, there are more quirky animal companions to befriend in puzzle RPG adventure **Baldo: The Guardian Owls**. A cryptic prophecy heralds the return of the 'No-Heart' creature, a being previously sealed away by the titular owls and whose reappearance is apparently predestined. It's up to you to unravel what has been foretold and see if you can't rewrite the ending of the prophecy by solving puzzles and exploring dungeons. Wearing its inspirations on its sleeve, the hand-drawn stylings of this whimsical world go on a charm offensive with a quirky cast brought to life by endearing character animation and appealing art direction inspired by classic anime.

Splitgate

Too portal afford a new game? Try this

INFO

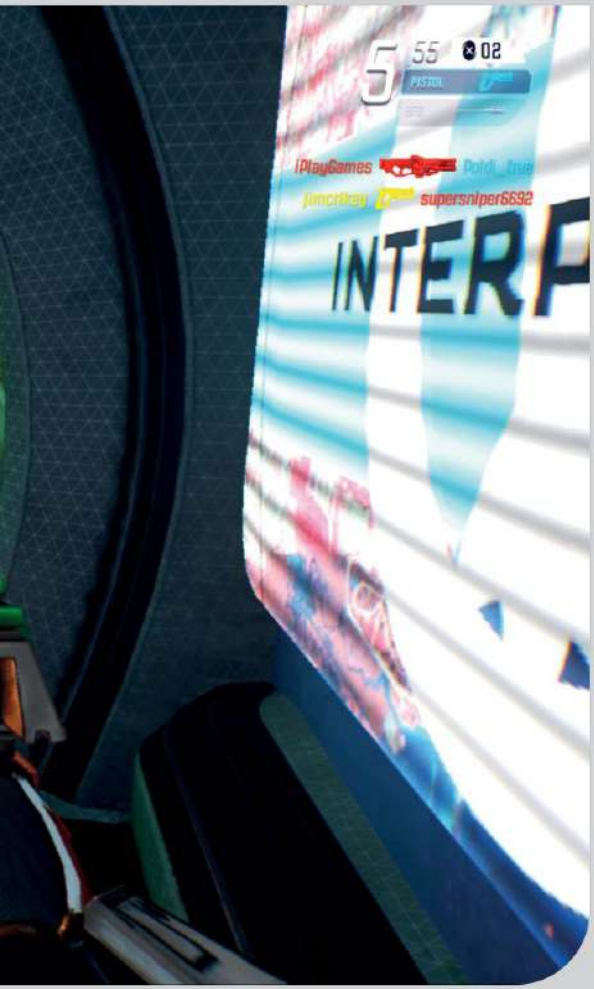
FORMAT PS5, PS4 (reviewed)
PRICE Free (in-game currency starts at £3.99)
ETA Out now
PUB 1047 Games
DEV 1047 Games
REVIEW N/A
PLAYERS 6-8
CROSSPLAY Yes (Xbox, PC)
CROSS-GEN Yes

This is a free-to-play game, but in many ways, you'd never know it. The complexity and shoddy tutorials typically found in free-to-play titles are absent, for one thing. The enemy team is red, yours is blue, and you shoot one another with guns. Even your *dog* could understand how it works. It's the portals, however, that make the experience feel fresh and exciting.

Splitgate would be a very good shooter even *without* the portals. The weapons on offer are diverse, and all are precise and satisfying to use. Movement is fast and so is the action, each excellently-designed map offering a huge variety of lines of sight and no truly safe hiding place. The game modes are all great fun too, from the traditional deathmatch to Oddball, where the game is won by the team which manages to hold onto the eponymous sphere the longest.

But the portals. *The portals*. That's the little touch of genius that really sets Splitgate apart. Each player can create two, placing them on any of the purpose-built blue surfaces dotted throughout each map. Once you've placed them, together they act as a doorway no matter how far apart they are – that's the point of portals, after all. There's no limit to how far you can cast a portal, either. If you can see a suitable surface, you can hurl a portal straight

> Any player can travel through any portal, but you can only see through your own.



onto it. When a player dies in the game, their portals close as well.

GATE SCOTT!

Any player can travel through any portal, but you can only see through your own. When you come across an enemy portal, you *could* close it down with a grenade. But perhaps it's worth firing into it instead in case there's a sniper looking through? Or you could jump in and take out any enemies hanging around the other side. A gamble, but very satisfying when it pays off.

Using a portal to snipe always carries risks (not to mention the fact that it means you're paying less attention to your immediate surroundings), so it never feels cheap. They can (and should) be used defensively, too. One tactic is to launch a portal when you spawn, run off looking for enemies, then create another if you get in trouble so that you can return to your starting point. Don't forget to close the portal behind you, though…

The thrill of making a last-minute escape through a portal, the satisfaction of making multiple kills via one, the tension of jumping into a portal blind, the simple joy of taking enemies down without using one at all… no wonder the beta proved so popular that the servers were overwhelmed. The fact that the in-game currency and cosmetics are politely tucked into the shop tab rather than being thrown in your face at every opportunity is the icing on the cake (which isn't a lie).

KNOW THYSELF

This heavily-armoured beast is you. Well, it could be. There are plenty of skins already, and while the fanciest cost money, you can get some decent ones for free from the drops you unlock.

Your trusty portal gun. Again, there are different skins to unlock for it, but to be honest it's hard to tell them apart outside your menus. The important thing is that it lets you shoot those tasty portals!

Did we mention that *you have a jetpack?* Fuel's very limited, but it's handy for extended jumps and controlled descents. And, yes, there are different colours and designs to be had. We do love jetpacks.

We thought we'd seen everything the online FPS had to offer, then Splitgate appeared through a portal and shot us in the face with a brilliant new idea. **Luke Kemp**

9
PLAY

DLC

FREE (DURING CROSSOVER), £32.99 (SEASON PASS)

Watch Dogs: Legion – Assassin's Creed Crossover

Sister of the blade

Legion's 5.5 post-launch update introduces new online and campaign modes but we're going to focus on its main act. London remains in dire straits, so a trained assassin is unlikely to make things much worse. Title Update 5.5 introduces Darcy Clarkson, a woman with a "deeply rooted connection to the London-based brotherhood." 'Knife to meet you,' we say!

You get acquainted with her through two story missions plus a smattering of side-missions that are free for everyone. The aforementioned new modes, including one where you tackle hordes of the undead, are also freebies.

Darcy's arsenal is tailored towards stealth. The sneaky approach gets a suitably futuristic update in the shape of Darcy's AR disguise. Paired with her wrist-mounted blade, it's a killer combination. When things are too crowded for the one-on-one approach, Darcy can whip out her gun. She can then either bump off enemies from afar or shoot them with darts that make foes lose their senses and carry out Darcy's dirty work for her.

Darcy boasts one final tool of her deadly trade. Her Eagle Drone fulfils a similar scouting role to Eivor's raven, except this bit of tech can also self-destruct and emit a localised electromagnetic pulse. Very neat, but we're glad Sýnin doesn't explode in a messy plume of feathers in Valhalla. Darcy is playable in campaign and online modes outside this crossover, but only for Season Pass owners.

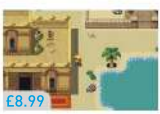
> Darcy's AR disguise plus wrist-mounted blade are a killer combination.

ALSO ON PSN

£3.99

LITTLE NIGHTMARES 2 – THE NOME'S ATTIC

This brief DLC adds a puzzle centred on the Nome's latest hidey hole. Available in the game's first area, exploring the Nome's attic fully will net you a suitably pointy hat.



£8.99

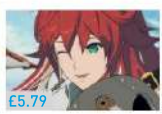
RPG MAKER MV – DS SET 1

Featuring reams of tile sets, backgrounds, and graphics, it's easier than ever to make your own RPG game from the comfort of your console. This pack features asset sets that range in feel from icy to arid.

FREE

SACKBOY: A BIG ADVENTURE – SACKNANA COSTUME

The bygone yellow costume returns and we've never felt so a-peeling. You can now dress your own Sackers as an excellent source of Sack-potassium.



£5.79

GUILTY GEAR STRIVE – JACK-O' VALENTINE

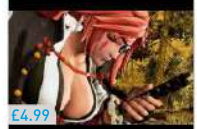
Jack-O' returns for another round. A somewhat technical fighter, she summons servants that she can then either throw or command to attack. They can also explode.

£3.29

MY HERO ONE'S JUSTICE 2 – HITOSHI SHINSO

Available as part of the second season pass, Hitoshi Shinso is all about stunning his enemies with his quirk and then wrapping up the fight with his binding cloth.

DLC



£4.99

SAMURAI SHODOWN – BAIKEN

Missing from Guilty Gear Strive, the wandering samurai Baiken instead joins the roster of this weapon-based fighter, where her katana is sure to come in handy. Part of the third season of DLC characters, her revenge quest and handiness with a blade makes her a natural fit.

£24.99

TRAIN SIM WORLD 2 – GREAT WESTERN EXPRESS

We don't exactly miss our morning commute but this DLC offers something a bit different. Climbing aboard at London Paddington, you'll work a day in the life of a train driver steering high-speed trains along the Great Western main line.

TBA

DEAD BY DAYLIGHT – HELLRAISER

If the appeal of this spiky-faced lad in leather banging on about flesh has always puzzled you, this upcoming DLC may help you get the point. One of the main characters in the Hellraiser movies, Pinhead is set to hunt down survivors before the year is out.

LIVE GAMES

SEASON

Season of the Witch

The Witch Queen comes to Destiny 2

Season Of The Lost has already begun, introducing a new artefact, exotic weapon, and glitzy armour set to Destiny 2. If you've already got the premium season pass, you can slip into the seasonal armour and pick up the Lorentz Driver exotic linear fusion rifle right now. The longest season to date, it'll run until 22 February next year, which is when the heavily teased Witch Queen expansion will finally drop.

Destiny's years of accumulated lore can be tricky to untangle at the best of times but here's what you need to know: major player and Queen Of The Awoken Mara Sov (that's her in the picture above) is back in the Dreaming City, stirring things up in a bid to gain audience with a particular long-time villain. In the new six-player Astral Alignment activity, you'll help Mara Sov light the way to the Shattered Realm and rescue her fellow Tech Witches who're lost there.

If you're far from green as a Guardian, you'll already be aware of big bad Savathûn, the terrifying Witch Queen herself. However, if you've not been keeping up to date with all things Destiny, all you need to know is that she's spooky, scheming, and even taller than Resident Evil's Lady Dimitrescu. We doubt we're the only ones who are eager to make her acquaintance.

Major player Mara Sov is back in the Dreaming City, stirring things up.

NEW

QUAKE

Known for its frenetic action and score by Nine Inch Nails' Trent Reznor, Quake's enduring appeal is understandable. If you care about the FPS genre, playing this old-school action shooter is essential, and it's easy to do as the game has arrived on PS4. To celebrate its 25th birthday, this enhanced rerelease is a joint effort between original developer Id Software and Nightdive Studios. With four-person, cross-platform co-op and deathmatches for up to eight players, there are lots of ways to introduce your pals to this classic.

NEW

AMONG US

If you've ever enjoyed a game of Werewolves or Mafia and have been missing social deduction games, this one's for you. Already a hit on other platforms, Among Us traps you aboard a ship in deep space with an interloper that is essentially John Carpenter's The Thing. It's up to you and your crewmates to root them out – if they don't point the finger at you first. Slated for release in the near future with Ratchet & Clank skins, there's plenty of other free cosmetic options besides for your doomed little jellybean.

UPDATE

FORTNITE – IMPOSTORS

They say imitation is the highest form of flattery. A traitor has hidden among the ranks of the Imagined Order in this season seven mode. Looking like any other Agent, Impostors work to eliminate everyone else and take control of The Bridge. They've got unique abilities – they can forcibly teleport players and make everyone look like Peely so they can cover their tracks. These are perhaps the mode's most unique aspects, though it's difficult not to draw comparisons to another social deduction game...

LIVE GAMES

Online games still holding our attention

Free-to-play title **Genshin Impact** had our attention long before Guerrilla Games and Mihoyo announced that Aloy would be venturing to Teyvat. The **Horizon Zero Dawn** protagonist will be completely free to players who have reached Adventure Rank 20, and she'll boast bow attacks as well as ice elemental affinity.

Genshin's gacha elements and microtransactions are impossible to ignore but it's worth highlighting just how much game you do get for free. If you have your heart set on someone for your party, you're best off keeping an eye on the store and putting down real-world cash for them. But if you're happy to go with the flow when it comes to party composition, Genshin will reward persistent exploration of its massive open world with free gacha go-arounds. It's not overly generous in dishing these out but they're given at frequent enough intervals that we don't feel like we're losing out by not paying up.

It's clear that Genshin's appealing cast is Mihoyo's real money-maker as every part of its open world is offered for no cost. Every chapter presents a sizeable chunk of story, with the latest 2.1 update set to wrap up chapter 2's Archon Quests. Titled Floating World Under The Moonlight, the story update ties up some loose threads on the recently added archipelago of Inazuma and will introduce even more characters for players to net from gacha pulls.

PS5 Hall of fame

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO THE NEW GEN'S GREATEST GAMES

01

Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart

This popcorn-munching space adventure is a wonderful return to form for the lombax/robo duo, and the new dimension delights with characters like Ratchet counterpart Rivet. Between instantaneous rift-hopping and smartly designed weapon triggers, it plays with every unique PS5 feature to create a console must-play that's top of the class, and will have you grinning throughout epic set-pieces.

02

Demon's Souls

Not many games allow you to feel the thrum of a gigantic heart in the controller. From sword slashes against nightmarish creatures to feeling magic fill your hands, this stunning recreation of the PS3 classic is a tour of just what makes PS5 so great.

03

Final Fantasy VII Remake Intergrade

Cloud and the gang get a glow up with better visuals and slicker combat that limit breaks this bold reimagining of the Midgar section. Yuffie joins in with an extra story that bridges the gap between this and what's to come, cleverly playing on nostalgia and fan expectation.

04

Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales

A new hero for a new generation, Miles Morales swings onto PS5 with a new sense of purpose. The low-key story offers a more intimate Spider-adventure than Parker's bombastic escapade, but when the action kicks in the ray-traced visuals light up the screen.

05

Control Ultimate Edition

Jesse Faden's mind-bending, environment-destroying, object-chucking new-weird adventure sings on PS5. A frame rate of 60fps delights, and Remedy's use of ray tracing is among the best we've seen. The only problem is you have to pick only one of two visual options.

06

Hitman 3

On PS5 Agent 47's latest hit list looks beautiful – oh boy, those reflections. The good news is not only can you play the latest missions on PS5, you can replay all missions from Hitman and Hitman 2 inside IO's new PS5-developed engine. That's *a lot* of content.

07

Astro's Playroom

Free and pre-installed on your PS5, this is more than a showcase for your new console's best, most innovative features. Astro's Playroom is a beautifully-crafted, if short-lived, platform adventure that takes a tour through everything that makes PS5 so special.

08

Resident Evil Village

Ethan Winters discovers why this village's house prices were so low. As he searches for his stolen baby, tall vampire Lady Dimestrecu tees off a host of supernatural nasties in the slickest Resi to date, mixing bombastic action with some series-topping fright.

09

Guilty Gear Strive

If this is the smell of the game, then we don't need any candles. Brash as ever, and laden with head-banging tracks, this anime-styled fighter is a spectacle to watch or play. Pared-down mechanics make it accessible, but there's still plenty of depth for skilled players.

10

The Nioh Collection

Team Ninja is on top form with its unique samurai take on soulslikes. Tough as hanzo steel, both games run great on PS5, and offer nearly 200 hours of co-op demon-slaying action that'd put even Yojimbo through his paces. It's a challenge well worth taking on.

11

Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order

Cal and BD-1 Jedi jump over any hurdles the original release threw their way, PS5's power making this feel like the game it should have been at launch. While a little safe at times, this adventure feels like classic Star Wars as you explore planets metroidvania-style.

12

Mortal Kombat 11 – Ultimate

You may have played Mortal Kombat 11 before, but you've never played it like this. In 4K at 60fps this PS5-upgraded Ultimate edition plays faster, smoother, and better than ever. Making good use of the quick-loading SSD, the game's fights come thick and fast.

13

Chivalry 2

This big multiplayer bash has armies clashing at one another with physics-based slashes, stabs, and swoops. Even cabbages can become weapons. Part-FPS, part-fighter, and part-ragdoll 'em up, bloody war has never been as joyous or silly. Oh, biscuits!

14

Dirt 5

On PS4 Dirt 5 is one of the best sim-cade racers around; on PS5 Codemasters' racer offers various performance modes to make the colourful action really sing. This is one of the few games on PS5 to currently offer 120fps, which ensures a super-smooth race.

15

Disco Elysium: The Final Cut

Welcome to Revachol. You're a mess of a cop with no memory, and barely any clothes. Solve a hanging, invent communism, sing karaoke... but do it your way. Skill check successes and failures pave a story of your own, and the writing is superb.

16 NEW

Hades

After a wait, Supergiant's latest rushes to the defence of roguelikes and leaves us going "Hell yeah." It effortlessly pulls off that 'just one more go' feeling thanks to fast, frenetic combat and the rewarding nuggets of story each death treats you to. Slick and stylish.

17

The Pathless

The Journey and Abzû developer returns to PlayStation with a beautifully stylish open-world adventure that recalls Ico and Shadow Of The Colossus. When not battling massive monstrous beasts we're encouraged to pet our eagle, and that's not a euphemism. Charming.

18

Bugsnax

You are what you eat in this peculiar adventure that's not afraid to walk (and crawl) its own path. Scour Snaktooth Island for its missing denizens, wolf down a handful of Snax... and see what happens. It doesn't exactly push PS5, but it will test your imagination.

19

F1 2021

We finally reach Braking Point, but in a good way. Braking Point is this racer's new story mode, which is packed with engaging drama and comes on top of an already stellar career mode. The racing is the slickest yet, looking great on PS5. This is far from just a pitstop.

20

Metro Exodus: Complete Edition

Emerging from the tunnels of last-gen, Exodus dazzles us with some truly impressive technical feats. Environments are stunningly realised with beautiful lighting, and each gun feels characterful with DualSense features – especially the pump rifle.

21

Devil May Cry 5 Special Edition

Slugging your way through double-digit hordes of enemies at 120fps ensures this PS5 remake of the PS4 classic impresses. If you want visual pizazz over framerates then turn on ray tracing and play at a solid 60fps. Special in name and nature.

22

Overcooked! All You Can Eat

Like a food festival filled with laughing gas, there's no end to co-op shenanigans as you shout at one another to co-ordinate increasingly complex recipes, hurling food around makeshift, ludicrous kitchens. Includes all prior Overcooked! content, plus some extra courses.

23

Yakuza: Like A Dragon

Out with Kazuma Kiryu and real-time brawling, in with Dragon Quest fan Ichiban Kasuga and his turn-based street scraps. A gripping crime yarn merges with laugh-out-loud moments in the way only Yakuza can pull off, and Kasuga instantly becomes a new favourite.

24

Outriders

At a glance it's muddier than Glastonbury, but what lies beneath is a clever co-op shooter with a surprising number of interesting, unique builds. Classes bestow powers like firestorms or teleporter time-manipulation, to make you cream of this alien planet crop.

25

It Takes Two

That classic tale of divorce where two parents turn into tiny doll versions of themselves. In mandatory co-op you have to work together to find your depressed daughter and lift the spell, while dealing with a self-help book giving spicy relationship advice. The usual.

THE GAMES GLOW UP

PlayStation 4 hits replayed on PS5.
This month: **Bioshock: The Collection**

All these years after **Bioshock** launched, the underwater city of Rapture remains a hugely compelling setting. Unfortunately, experiencing fear and delight in an art deco complex leagues beneath the sea has proved a bit of a washout on PlayStation – until recently.

The first game was remastered for PS4 as part of **Bioshock: The Collection** in 2016, and while the ports of later entries fared better, the game that started it all looked a little leaky. Players returning to Rapture reported issues. On a base PS4 you could expect a framerate that fluctuated between 45 and 60fps as well as screen tearing. For a first-person shooter, this was far from ideal. On the base console, you also only got 1080p resolution. If the Big Daddies didn't do you in, the juddering action definitely would.

We're pleased to report that on PS5 it's much smoother sailing. For starters, that questionable framerate now hits 60fps on the new-gen hardware. You also get a 1440p image on PS5, though anyone who's recently played the game on PS4 Pro will have already experienced that thanks to a patch released last year. That said, even Pro had frame drops.

You still don't get a locked 60fps on PS5 but it's more consistent than anything you'd experience on either a base PS4 or Pro. It is a strange the first Bioshock's framerate isn't locked, though, as the two other games in the remastered collection – its sequel and Infinite – enjoy a locked 60fps.

Considering these games made their PlayStation debuts on PS3, that's a big improvement. We've enjoyed revisiting both Rapture and Columbia on PS5 – even if some facets of Infinite's personality do wear a little thin all these years on. PS5 makes it easier to revisit old faves, and we're looking forward to sampling more gaming classics now their leaks have been plugged by the new-gen hardware.

A respectable framerate means Rapture-ous applause from us.

PS4 Hall of fame

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO THE LAST GEN'S GREATEST GAMES

01

Uncharted 4: A Thief's End

Nathan Drake's swan song is a daring evolution. It combines series-defining set-pieces, quietly devastating storytelling beats, and sprawling levels that make you feel like a real-life explorer. This franchise finale retains its signature charm, with the wisecracks firing as fast as the bullets, while the new characters each justify their inclusion. With an astonishing attention to detail, it's Naughty Dog's best yet.

02

Red Dead Redemption 2

There are a lot of open-world games, but none that make you feel like you're a part of a world in quite the same way as Arthur Morgan's wild west adventure. Tremendously physical, an epic story, and some of the most satisfying headshots you'll ever find.

03

Grand Theft Auto V

Laughing in the face of other cross-gen ports, GTA V on PS4 is more than a mere HD remaster. Upped to a glorious 1080p, it weaves everything that made the PS3 original great, with new music, more dynamic weather, and a game-changing FPS mode.

04

Final Fantasy VII Remake

It feels like the game you remember from PS1, and that's Square's greatest achievement. Everything is dragged up to date, from the combat to the visuals. This remake even manages a late-game twist that could reset the franchise. Brave, bold, essential.

05

God Of War

A departure in some ways but a resounding return in others, Kratos is back with a son *and* a ruddy big axe. Taking the legend from Greek to Norse mythology, this entry brings a lot to the table while improving on what was core to the earlier series' identity.

06

The Last Of Us Part II

Arguably the original is holistically better but there are few games that push PS4 to its limits as this sequel does. With near photoreal visuals, emotional twists that land, and enough new ideas to ensure you're always thinking, this is a slick followup.

07

Dreams

This is a feature-laden platform of artistic tools that enables you to create everything from characters, elements, and scenes to entire games, and resets any ideas about what a console 'game' should be and do. Dreams should be installed on every PS4.

08

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt Game Of The Year Edition

The White Wolf's epic journey is an RPG experience like no other on PS4. It's been made even more spectacular with this gigantic pack stuffed with DLC, making it a must-have part of any gaming library.

09

Assassin's Creed Odyssey

A beautiful open world where every Greek island tells a unique story. AC Odyssey is a epic in the truest sense, with lively writing, mythical beasts to battle, and a poignant Assassin's Creed story that lays the bed for all the lore to come. A brilliant spectacle.

10

Horizon Zero Dawn

A staggeringly large world that condenses cracking combat, accessible systems, and uncut eye candy into an action RPG that will please anyone. In Aloy, PlayStation might just have a new icon. Come for the robo-fights, stay for the exquisitely dense mythology.

11

Marvel's Spider-Man

Borrowing heavily from Rocksteady's acclaimed Batman series, this delivers the heart and soul of Marvel's superhero. It ticks every box you could ask for: perfect web-swinging, a powerful story, a roster of classic villains, and all of New York City to defend.

12

Persona 5 Royal

The most stylish JRPG ever made finds its definitive form in expanded release Royal. It combines dark and moving teen angst with unforgettable friendships that power you up in the heart-invading dungeons, and sets the gold standard for the genre.

13

Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice

FromSoftware's latest adventure repackages its unflinchingly difficult combat into a fantastical take on feudal Japan. More accessible than Bloodborne but layered with equally clever and subtle ideas, this is director Hidetaka Miyazaki's best yet.

14

Bloodborne

With the finest third-person melee combat in gaming, droolworthy art design and the most twisted monsters imaginable, this is a gorgeously gothic must-have. The Old Hunters expansion adds enough nightmare fuel to make a return to Yharnam essential.

15

Monster Hunter: World

Presenting a vibrant open world, light on story but heavy on monster-mashing action, this is the most accessible entry in the series yet. Perfecting the feel-good grind through its complex systems and pitch-perfect multiplayer, it's a PS4 must-play.

16

Resident Evil 2

Powered by the RE Engine, this remake is more than a classic game with a facelift. The new Tyrant and improved zombie AI add tension, and fresh areas not seen in the PS1 classic update the core gameplay making this Resi 2 a celebration of PS1 *and* PS4.

17

Hitman 3

Rounding out the World Of Assassination trilogy, Agent 47's latest is a celebration of everything we love about the series: playful maps, experimental gameplay, and endless replay value. This full stop on 47's career to date feels like a good ending to a great series.

18

Mass Effect Legendary Edition

A space opera in game form. Explore the galaxy as you try to stop a universe-wide threat, building a team of the best as you go. The adventures are better than ever in this smoothed-over version. A fan of sci-fi sagas? Then you owe it to yourself to have one of your own.

19

Days Gone

On the surface this seems to be a step backwards: a testosterone-fuelled Freaker-killing adventure, one man and his bike versus the apocalypse. Slowly you realise Bend Studio's playing with you, and everything's flipped on its head – while the action's excellent throughout.

20

Resident Evil Village

Thick with atmosphere and supernatural thrills, the latest Resident Evil celebrates the best the series has to offer. Too slick, too tame? In places, but this game pushes the PS4 to its limits while managing to tease a thrilling end to the Baker trilogy.

21

Devil May Cry 5

Another classic PlayStation series returns to cracking form on PS4. Slicing up demons and doing so stylishly has never felt better, especially when each of the three characters (Nero, Dante, and V) plays so uniquely. It looks stunning, and is even better to play.

22

Dishonored 2

The follow-up to a PS3 great, mixing a creative skillset with impressive level design to create a Kaldwin-ning immersive sim. From the shifting rooms of The Clockwork Mansion to learning to link your powers, there's so much scope for experimenting.

23

The Last Of Us Remastered

This modern masterpiece just gets stronger with age, like a full-bodied stilton. A brutal, emotionally honest take on the end of the world, Naughty Dog's stealth shooter is simply one of the best games ever, even if this PS4 port doesn't add much to it.

24

Metro Exodus

Larger but maintaining an emphasis on storytelling and experimentation, this sequel to Last Light pulls no punches. If you're looking for one of the best narrative-led shooters on PS4 this mix of FPS, horror, stealth, and survival shouldn't be ignored.

25

Shadow Of The Colossus

Bluepoint completely overhauls the visuals of Team Ico's masterpiece but still manages to match the original step-for-step in its remake. New controls and a beautiful photo mode add to the package. Wander's tragic quest has never looked or played better.

STILL PLAYING

Games that continue to hold our attention

PICK #1

Neo: The World Ends With You

Jess Kinghorn is back in the 'Buya

I've been waiting over a decade to re-enter the Reaper's game and Neo has more than delivered. I've cleared the main story (plus a few post-game chapters) but there's plenty left to do. I've got pins to collect, food to sample, and pig Noise to send squealing all the way home. All TWEWY nerds know how satisfying the post-game is; you can revisit earlier chapters and blast foes on hard mode for rare pins. But besides all that, it means I get to spend more quality time with my new bestie Nagi.

PICK #2

Judgment

Oscar Taylor-Kent tips the scales of justice

With Lost Judgment imminent, it's a good time to call Judgment to the stand, decked out in its PS5 best, to give evidence. And consider this jury impressed. Yagami's acrobatic fighting style really benefits from the extra smoothness. I appreciate how it's different to Yakuza all the more. This feels like a game built for Dragon Engine, rather than how Yakuza 6 felt, forced to shove a decades-old fighting system into its bones. Hopefully there'll be many more verdicts to lay down in future.

> Yagami's acrobatic fighting style really benefits from the extra smoothness on PS5.

PICK #3

Dirt 5

Milford Coppock returns to Codies' rally good racer

The July update to Codemasters' PS5 launch title has put me firmly back behind the wheel of its off-road, on ice/dirt/gravel arcade racer. Two new tracks and an abundance of new events and cars, coupled with tweaks to the already impressive haptics and adaptive triggers, have led me to spend a crazy amount of time getting sideways and generally doing *anything but* driving in a straight line. After returning to this, the release of Grid Legends really can't come soon enough.

Sure, Codemasters' own F1 2021 is a newer title, but this is just more fun!

PSVR Hall of fame

THE VIRTUAL REALITY HITS YOU HAVE TO PLAY

01

Tetris Effect

Tetris, yeah? It might be a great game, but it's easy to understand why you'd brush this version off as 'just more Tetris' at a glance. Yet Tetsuya Mizuguchi's trippy, transcendent take on the block-based puzzler is nothing short of a masterpiece. Sure, you can play it without PSVR, but in the virtual space it really becomes next level, transforming one of the tightest puzzle games ever made into an emotional ride.

02

Hitman 3

Every mission in the World Of Assassination trilogy can be played in PSVR via the latest entry in the series. That's a *lot* of murderous action. It all plays brilliantly too, with the act of puzzling through hits as Agent 47 perfectly suited to virtual reality. One of PSVR's best.

03

The Persistence

This first-person horror roguelike offers perfectly sized chunks of survival bursts. It's everything you'd expect from a full PS4 release, but in PSVR it's filled with clever ideas, unique weapons, genuine jump scares, and fab looks – plus great couchplay as well.

04

Rez Infinite

Tetsuya Mizuguchi's vision becomes reality in PSVR. This psychedelic rhythm rail shooter has achieved its final form. Its crowning achievement? New level Area X; it's powerful enough to bring players to tears. Worthy of its name, this is a timeless title.

05

Astro Bot Rescue Mission

This pint-sized adventure packs charm in spades even if it isn't exactly chock-full of challenge. Bringing the classic puzzle platformer formula bang up to date in PSVR, it won't take many levels before you're calling out, "Beam me up, Botty!" Also, the nippers will love it.

06

Star Wars: Squadrons

A fan's dream come true: experience epic Star Wars space battles from the cockpits of the films' most famous starfighters. Whether you're flying a TIE fighter or X-wing there's absolutely no thrill like skimming the surface of a Star Destroyer in PS VR.

07

Iron Man VR

With a finely-crafted control setup that enables flight within small sandbox maps, and gives you the option to inhabit the designer shoes of the billionaire playboy too, Iron Man VR is an almost-perfect interpretation of the famous Avenger. It's a PSVR must-play.

08

Blood & Truth

The truth? You can't handle the truth. But if you can, then you'll discover one of PSVR's best shooters, tied to the kind of slick cinematic narrative we're used to from Sony's non-VR releases. Blood & Truth is one of the most complete games for PSVR.

09

Keep Talking And Nobody Explodes

Who knew bombs could bring people *together*? With one headsetted Defuser, and as many Experts as you can fit around a 23-page manual, no other VR game comes close for inclusive, endless multiplayer fun. Just make sure you don't let Ian issue any instructions – KABOOM!

10

Statik

Saw meets Portal in this fantastic puzzler. It makes ingenious use of the DualShock 4 by giving every button a specific function. You'll need to use them all to free your hands from the strange box in which they're trapped. An intriguing concept done well.

11

Firewall: Zero Hour

There's only one game mode, a cat-and-mouse assault to find and either destroy or protect a laptop, but when the shooting is this laser-focused, who could want more? A PS Aim controller is a must to get the most from PSVR's standout shooter.

12

Resident Evil VII: Biohazard

Can you can go eye-to-eye with the Bakers? Playing in VR raises the tension to almost unbearable levels and has gameplay benefits such as face-aiming, which makes shooting a lot easier. A brilliant example of how VR can improve already great games.

13

Sniper Elite VR

With realistic gunplay at the heart of this series, it was always going to be a natural fit for VR. But its support for an array of setups and how it squeezes a truly impressive amount of tension into 20-minute missions means this hits the bullseye of VR greatness.

14

Doom VFR

A new take on a classic game, this proves first-person shooters can shine in PSVR. A mix of control choices, including the PS Aim controller, ensures Doom is as fast and fluid in VR as it's ever been. Every PSVR owner needs this demon-slaying outing in their collection.

15

To The Top

This creative platform-puzzler enables you to scamper, jump, and skate across its 35 sandbox worlds with the aid of your PS Move controllers. It's as physically demanding to play as it is perplexing, and all the better for it. To The Top is a PSVR one-off.

16

Star Trek: Bridge Crew

Mixes the fanboy fantasy of nestling in the Captain's chair (or taking control of the helm, weapons, or engineering section) on a USS starship with the strongest co-op experience on PSVR. This is Star Trek's finest hour on PlayStation, and the community's *great*.

17

Everybody's Golf VR

Golf and virtual reality go together like ham and eggs or rhubarb and custard. Mmm, tasty. In PSVR you swing and chip shots, lean over putts, and become immersed in the act of putting a ball in a small hole. It's near perfection, and one of PSVR's essentials.

18

Sprint Vector

A crazy mix of SSX racing and obstacle course hijinks, Sprint Vector makes use of the best control setup on PSVR to deliver a near-perfect experience. A single-player Challenge mode and online races impress; only the poor single-player AI holds it back.

19

Batman: Arkham VR

Not only is the training mission an unparalleled exercise in wish fulfilment (Wayne Manor! The Batcave! Batarangs!) but the defiantly sharp, if short, campaign is the epilogue to Arkham Knight we needed and deserved. Bats off to you, Rocksteady.

20

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim VR

Though compromises have been made to texture detail and controls, you get all – yes, *all* – of The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, including the expansions, inside PSVR. It's immense. The scale and organic nature of the world at your feet overcomes any shortcomings.

21

Beat Saber

With your PSVR headset firmly on and PS Move controllers in hand, Beat Saber feels like the game both pieces of hardware were made for. In it you have to master songs and challenges by swiping your neon swords through the air and dodging with your head.

22

Moss

Guide adorable mouse heroine Quill through a fantasy storybook world full of virtual puzzles, fights with insects, and perfectly pitched Disney influences. There's no need to say cheese, because you'll be smiling as you play, all day long. This is effortlessly charming.

23

Accounting +

One of PlayStation's funniest games is a dark, twisted journey into the world of accounting. No, don't walk away now! It's an Inception-like dive into increasingly bizarre and frequently hilarious scenarios that will scratch the itch of any Rick And Morty fan.

24

Farpoint

This sci-fi shooter is a brilliant showcase for the PS Aim controller, a versatile bit of kit that makes the satisfying range of weapons it stands in for feel weighty and real. The game matches it, delivering a strong story and challenging co-op for great VR action.

25

Knockout League

Punching things is possibly the least creative use of the VR medium, but when it's used to create a classic arcade boxing sim that plays like a brutal puzzle puncher, it's irresistible. It's also good for you: it tracks your calorie count as you work up a sweat.

WHAT'S NEW PLUS-SY CAT?

Digging into the random acts of gaming a lengthy PS Plus subscription offers

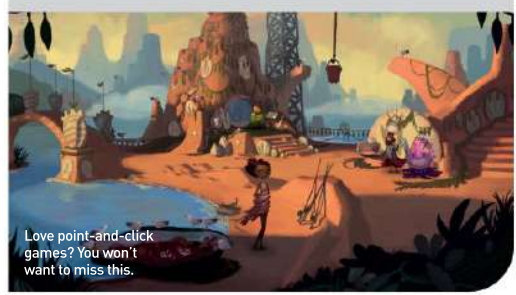
Psychonauts 2 is here at last (be sure to check out our review starting on p84) and there's no better time to revisit another Double Fine classic. Available on PS4 as a complete story via PS Plus back in October 2015, **Broken Age** initially debuted as a game of two halves.

Protagonists Vella and Shay seemingly live worlds apart but each chafes at the constraints of their home environment. Shay initially finds himself penned in by AI parents while Vella is destined for sacrifice to the monstrous Mog Chothra and works to end her hometown's ritual killing of young girls.

A point-and-click adventure that boasts all the visual polish we've come to expect from developer Double Fine, we gave the complete pack 9/10 back in our earlier incarnation as Official PlayStation Magazine. A glowing review, though upon reflection we do have to question the sidebar's insistence that it's even better than the iconic Grim Fandango.

Broken Age makes big swings with its structure but doesn't quite hit it out of the park when it comes to dovetailing its two halves. This is perhaps most obvious in an Act Two puzzle that clumsily crosses the boards between Shay and Vella's worlds without giving you much guidance on how to bring everything in step. Broken Age is still Double Fine dining but it stops just short of being cream of the crop.

Speaking of tasty treats, that brings us to September's PS Plus selection. **Overcooked! All You Can Eat** on PS5 was the main dish – and you can read more about the friendship-ruining series' history in our retro feature starting on p108. For dessert on PS4, Plus subscribers could also pick up asymmetrical multiplayer shooter **Predator: Hunting Grounds** and stealthy puzzle box **Hitman 2**. Bloody lovely!



Love point-and-click games? You won't want to miss this.

DIGITAL OFFER

FOR PRINT SUBSCRIPTION DEALS, TURN TO PAGE 62

THE NO.1 MAGAZINE FOR PLAYSTATION
PLAY
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PSVR
PS4
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SAINTS ROW
Is back to basics the right choice for Volition's sandbox series reboot?
→FIRST DETAILS
DOKEV
Is this super-cute RPG the best-looking PS5 game yet?
MARVEL
MIDNIGHT SUNS
XCOM's developer explores Marvel's darker side
HOW UNREAL ENGINE 5 IS SUPERCHARGING PLAYSTATION 5
HANDS-ON: HAS FAR CRY 6 BEEN WORTH THE WAIT?
WHY WE CAN'T WAIT TO RETURN TO GTA: VICE CITY
→HUGE REVIEW
DEATHLOOP
Why Arkane's time-looping shooter is this year's PS5 must-play!
→MAKING HISTORY
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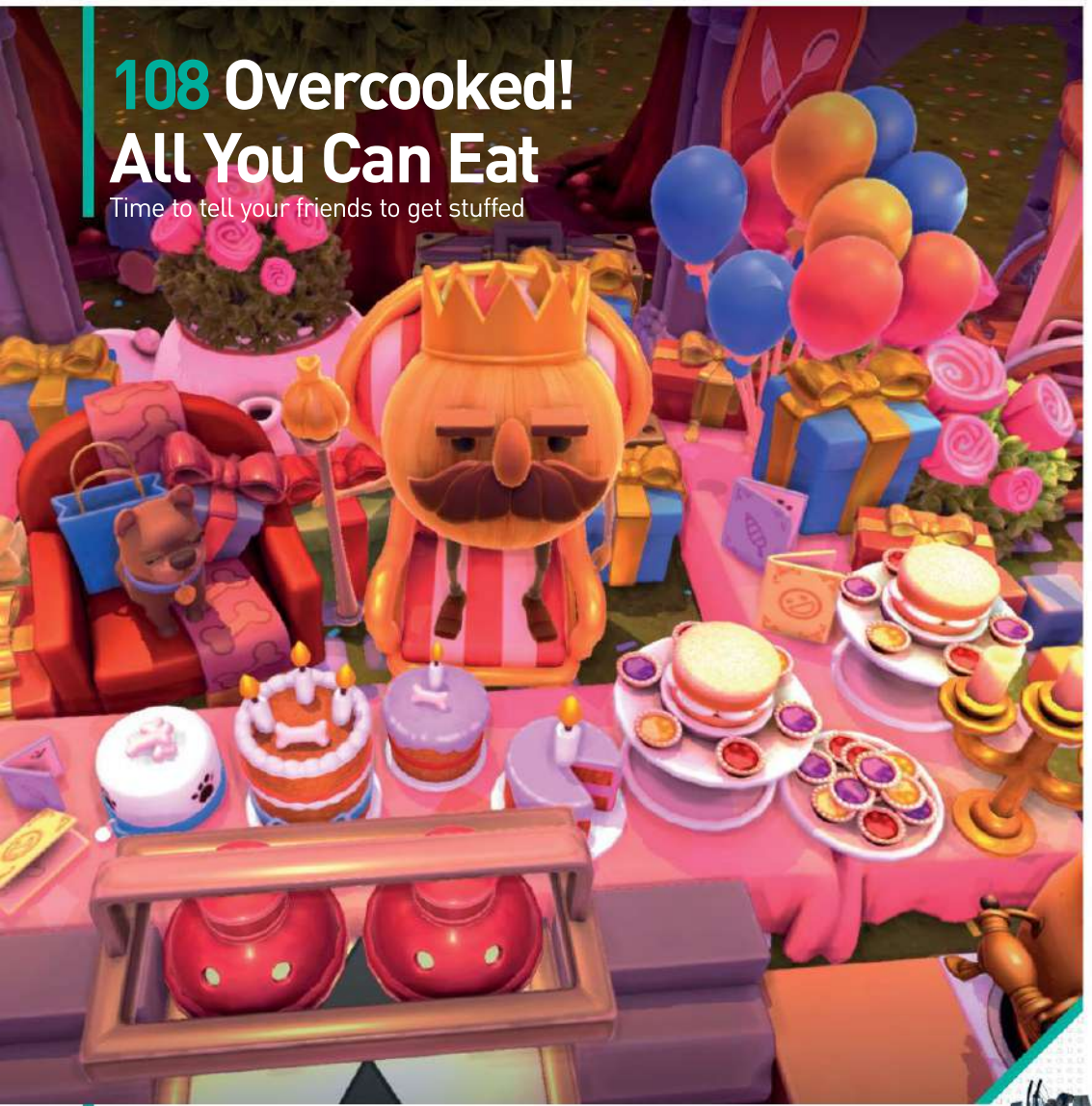

108 Overcooked! All You Can Eat

Time to tell your friends to get stuffed

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CLASSIC GAME

Final Fantasy VIII

Squall's well that ends well

Final Fantasy VIII is a love story. And it might be one of the greatest gaming has ever told. Coming off the back of the most successful RPG of all time (Final Fantasy VII) Squaresoft's follow-up needed to be different. After a game with corporate greed, climate change, and political activism at its heart captivated players the world over, Squaresoft needed to put the followup's ticker in a different place entirely. So the developer pinned it squarely to the sleeve of Squall's iconic leather jacket.

Sure, your emo protagonist was the victim of some dodgy localisation and is generally an edgelord sourpuss, but he has *heart*. With plenty of internal monologue (unusual for the series), you spend loads of time in his head, too. His grim worldview and reticence to let anyone past his emotional walls has defined the game in hindsight, but once you crack Squall's outer shell, you get to see perhaps one of the most broken protagonists in the series' long history.

Squall exists in a world that's been actively hostile towards an entire generation: rumours circulate of children being kidnapped to placate a mysterious sorceress, myriad wars span continents, and experimental technology is being adopted. Throw in the fact that he was orphaned at a young age, then abandoned by the one role model he had during his worst years, and you start to understand his prickliness when it comes to relationships and abandonment.

He's a traumatised child, laden with responsibility he never asked for, in a world he doesn't really want to save. Almost the polar opposite of Cloud. That was an intentional move by Squaresoft; not only was Squall designed to exist on the opposite side of the chess board to Cloud, the whole game was an answer to Final Fantasy VII: the levelling, powering-up, weapons, summons, and practically everything else were nearly as opposed to their FFVII equivalents as they could be. Squall, with his trauma, was the perfect figurehead for Final Fantasy's reinvention.

Upon leaving the orphanage that was his home for most of his childhood, Squall enlists with Balamb Garden: an elite mercenary academy designed to train generations of students to repel a vague but cataclysmic threat: the Sorceress. We begin our story at Squall's final exam (read: first deployment in an active war zone), and from here a web of political intrigue, conspiracy, and badly-explained science is spun.

DOWN THE GARDEN PATH

Story elements and world-building could be compared more to Le Guin and Asimov than Tolkien and Hobb: magic exists alongside science in a wonderful mix-up of vaguely defined rules that lets your imagination fill in the gaps. Military forces equipped with spells and swords battle across a map spanning the entire world, and Squall, in his mobile command base, makes the most of this open world as he strives to do right by the 'army' he's placed in command of, while trying to recall what on earth made him so messed up in the first pace.

Enter Final Fantasy VIII's biggest problem: amnesia. Forgetful protagonists aren't exactly rare in roleplaying games, but the late-coming, plot-hole-ridden, and off-handed revelations near the end sour things somewhat. For a game so immersive otherwise (the SeeD salary system is genius), it unravels as it nears its dramatic conclusion.

But that can be overlooked if you focus elsewhere. Instead of looking at the dodgy enemy level-scaling, the confusing junction system, or the baffling mid-game revelations about memory, focus on the game's exposed, tender heart: Squall and Rinoa. Through Rinoa, Squall's arc takes on so much more meaning. You see just how much this traumatised child has grown into the world so actively trying to oppress him. Cloud wanted to save the world, but Squall wants to save the woman he loves, and therein lies Final Fantasy VIII's most compelling trait.

Final Fantasy VIII paired angst with growth, and demonstrated that change, in the face of daunting, overwhelming odds, is possible, and beautiful. To communicate that, while letting you batter enemies with a sword that's *also* a gun? That's the beating heart of Final Fantasy, right there. ■

> "Once you crack Squall's outer shell, you get to see perhaps one of the most broken protagonists in the series' long history."

1 Squall's first mission to Dollet, sets the tone for the European-inspired, wartorn world. 2 Rinoa's journey to the precipice of villainy defines a lot of the narrative arc. 3 Seifer showed how badly things could have gone for Squall. 4 Balamb Garden is one of gaming's cosiest hubs. 5 Rinoa's introduction to Squall is loaded with foreshadowing.

INFO

PUB Squaresoft
DEV Squaresoft
RELEASED 1999
GET IT NOW £15.99, PS Store (Remastered)

NEED TO KNOW

1 Opening track Liberi Fatali was the soundtrack to a synchronised swimming event at the 2004 Summer Olympics.

2 During development, co-protagonist Rinoa was called 'Lenore'.

3 During the carnival cutscene, the dancers perform the dance from Michael Jackson's Thriller.

DON'T DELETE

Save icons for these past September moments spin in the PLAY hive mind. Do you remember this?

15 YEARS

The Legend Of Spyro: A New Beginning focused on combat more than platforming. Not even the star power of Elijah Wood in the titular role could save it from a tepid response. We say it's high time for a new Spyro game.

20 YEARS

Devil May Cry began life as a failed Resident Evil project. Juggling enemies in mid-air didn't fit the series' survival-horror action so it became its own dual-wielding game. Director Hideki Kamiya has been known for the smokin' sexy stylish series ever since.

25 YEARS

Everyone's favourite anti-gravity racing league returned, giving you the chance to put your expanded arsenal to good use. The Quake Disruptor made its first appearance in WipEout 2097 and has remained a series mainstay ever since.

MEMORY CARD

Dark Souls

Arise, Chosen Undead – it's your tenth birthday.

There's more to Dark Souls than just Git Gud gameplay. Team up with a friend or two in the PS4 remaster and find out for yourself.

The kingdom of Lordran has fallen, and you are a revenant cursed to resurrect again and again in this land until you lose your mind – a process known as hollowing. When it comes to high fantasy, this is as grimdark as it gets.

Known for its tough combat and novel death and multiplayer mechanics, as well as often-implicit storytelling, Dark Souls is regarded by many players as one of the best games of all time. Reader **John Bonas** is one of them, describing it as "Awe inspiring." **Seamus Bolton** is of a similar opinion, adding, "Praise the sun." **Damien Dallas** tells us, "[It's my] all time fav." However, the challenge leaves others cold.

DEARLY DEPARTED

If you've yet to arise as a chosen undead, we'll explain: your experience points are the same thing as your cash. When you die, you drop everything not already spent. Resurrecting in hollow form with half health, you have one chance to retrieve your loot from the spot you were felled – muck it up and it's gone for good. This, combined with slow combat, means mistakes are punished hard.

Daniel Winter reflects, "It wasn't my cup of tea. I can see why people like it, though."

Jassen LaPlant is less charitable: "Yeah, it was terrible. Demon's Souls was way better and I didn't really like that game that much."

But the challenge is part of the Souls series' enduring appeal. **Andrew Ritter** notes netting Dark Souls' Platinum trophy is a serious undertaking but concludes, "[It's] one of the games I wish I could wipe from my memory and play again."

Mark Anderson has that enviable experience awaiting him. He writes, "I missed this during my gaming-free years. So much to catch up on and explore! I'll order it right now for my PS4." We hope you love Lordran as much as we do!

INFO

PUB Namco Bandai Games
DEV FromSoftware
RELEASED ON PS3
RELEASE 2011
IF YOU LIKE THIS, TRY THIS...
The Nioh series boasts deeper swordfighting mechanics plus a world with a Japanese folklore twist. If 2D is more your thing, there's the compellingly gloomy Salt And Sanctuary or the violent metroidvania delights of Blasphemous.

▷ Join in the conversation as we celebrate PlayStation's past, present, and future with our community: you can email us at play@futurenet.com.

BYTE SIZE BITS

Essential numbers that add together to tell you everything you need to know about the game

09/10

Our score (in our previous incarnation) for both the PS3 original and the PS4 remaster. We love the Dark!

27,000,000

Copies of the Dark Souls trilogy have been sold, with the third entry the bestselling by a wide margin.

79

Months elapsed between Dark Souls' debut on PS3 and its PS4 remaster.

gamesradar.com/playmag

DEFENDING

Arno Dorian

Charm is a weapon for this French-aristocrat-turned-assassin argues Aaron Potter

Living up to the legacy of your ancestors is always going to be tough, and that's especially the case for Assassin Creed Unity's Arno, who simply wants to get by on his charm and have a good time. His romantic aspirations may play out against the backdrop of social unrest and economic depression in 18th-century France, but similar conditions didn't do Ezio any harm.

Arno very much wears his heart on his sleeve. He's thrown into the grip of the Assassin Order by a traumatic childhood event – losing his father. Sound familiar? Many players might not look back on Unity fondly, but Arno's inherent charisma coupled with this empathy-evoking incident makes for an incredibly well-rounded

> "THIS IS WHY I JOINED THE BROTHERHOOD... FOR REDEMPTION"

Assassin's Creed protagonist worthy of much more than a single outing. Unfortunately, technical glitches around the game's launch quickly made a followup game unlikely to happen – a shame, because his journey from carefree punk to master assassin is a true wonder. Arno may come from an aristocratic background, but that doesn't mean he can't handle himself in a fight.

His fierce independence and unwillingness to conform to the brotherhood's traditional standards are what separate Arno from his predecessors. And while his boyish attitude can sometimes lead to recklessness, his bond with long-time friend Élise (who turns out to be a Templar, one of the enemies of the Assassins) keeps him grounded, compelling him to seek more than revenge for his father's death. Before you know it, Arno begins to grow up, preferring to do things his own way while ultimately understanding the true purpose of and need for the creed. Not even Napoleon Bonaparte can sway his intention to dismantle the French government by Unity's end – even if he respects some of his views. Such traits make it easy to adore Arno.

INFO

GAME
Assassin's Creed Unity

TRIVIA
Arno is one of only two series protagonists to fall in love with a Templar – the other is Altaïr.

Arno's name is derivative of Arenwald, a word of old German origin meaning 'eagle power'.

Shay McCormick is revealed to be the killer of Arno's father in prequel Assassin's Creed Rogue.

SPIN-OFFS
Assassin's Creed Rogue

HOW TO PLAY?
PS Store, £24.99

COOKED TO PERFECTION

Some of Phil Duncan's favourite co-op and competitive games (in no particular order)

Storage Inc

Phil Duncan says this forklift-centric indie contributed some inspiration to the physicality of the Overcooked! series. There's a parallel between trying to get around each other's forklifts and slapping your sous chef out of the way.

Mashed

A top-down Micro-Machines-style racing game, its PS2 release featured unique co-op features. Playable with only a few buttons, up to four players could race by sharing two DualShock controllers.

Towerfall

An absolute all-timer, pitting four 2D archers against one another in local multiplayer, platform-based combat. Phil Duncan describes it as "really genius."

THE INTERVIEW

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **RELEASED** 2016 / **PUB** TEAM 17 / **DEV** GHOST TOWN GAMES / **GET IT NOW** PS STORE, £30.49 (ALL YOU CAN EAT)

OVERCOOKED! DISHES UP A BIRTHDAY FEAST

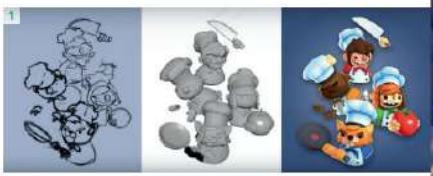
Ghost Town Games tells **Jess Kinghorn** about the road so far, and the runaway success of Overcooked!

Overcooked! All You Can Eat has received a free update in celebration of the series' five years of gaming domination – er, we mean its fifth birthday! It debuted in 2016, and you'd be hard-pressed to find someone who hasn't at least poked their head into the chaotic kitchen. From its slapstick tone to its chaotic action, its charm as a series is irresistible to many. The All You Can Eat rerelease, collating both games and all DLC, gets five new levels as part of the series' birthday bash.

Ghost Town Games is keeping hush-hush about the future but confirmed it's working on a new title and, yes, the game will have co-operative aspects. To mark such a momentous double whammy, we're catching up with co-director Phil Duncan and lead writer Gemma Langford to ask how they went about developing such a delicious co-op classic.

PLAY: Did the response to the first game surprise you?
Phil Duncan: Yes, yeah. No, it really did for a number of reasons, one of them being that we kind of made the game for ourselves. There was always that aspect of 'Oh, are we just making something that only we're going to enjoy? How big is that pool of people that will also enjoy the kind of thing that we've made for ourselves?' [...] Also the fact that when we pitched it to publishers, we got turned down by 99% of them.

Everyone was kind of like, 'Yeah, couch co-op's not really selling that well these days, we're not really that interested' – particularly because it didn't have online multiplayer at the time as well. I think when we released it, we were a little bit like, 'Well, you know what? We've heard from a lot of very influential people that have said this isn't going to do particularly well.' So we were hoping to maybe make our money back. [...] We were like, 'Okay, that would be enough and then we could do another project.' But yeah, the fact it took off was a massive surprise for us – and a lot of other people I suspect.



PLAY: Did the response to the first game affect the development of the sequel?
PD: Ah, that's a good question. [...] That there was such a positive response, first of all, was a sign that we could now go digging into our back catalogue of ideas of all the stuff that we had to leave out of the first game, by virtue of the fact that we made the game in 18 months. It was just [me and co-director Oli De-Vine], and we basically released it when we ran out of money. There was no 'That's absolutely, 100% the game we want to make! It has all the levels and all the bells and whistles!'

> "We were hoping maybe to make our money back... The fact it took off was a massive surprise for us."

PLAY: It sounds like you had a very pleasant surprise!
PD: It was, it was really nice! It was nice to hear from so many different players, you know, that they enjoyed what we made, and they got the same sort of kick out of it that we wanted people to.

There was definitely a feeling of like, 'Okay, actually, you know what? We left a lot of stuff out. Now, we actually have this opportunity to add that stuff in.' And then the other big feature that we added for the sequel was the fact that you could play it online, which was where Team 17 came in, effectively. I mean, they published the first game, but they were co-developers on the sequel, so they were able to help us raise the bar and to add aspects like that. Which, with just the two of us at the time working on it – and Gemma [Langford, the series' lead writer and studio manager] – we couldn't have handled [on our own], really. [...] The extra stuff Team 17 were responsible for [was] just like taking my sort of rubbish, thrown-together artwork and making it tidy and lovely.

PLAY: Clearly your artwork was illustrative enough!
PD: It's more than that. The whole [first] game was sort of held together with glue and string! [They were], you know, professional artists who have been doing it for years and years, and I was a designer before starting Ghost Town so I was sort of figuring it out as I went along. There was a definite sense of embarrassment sending these things over and being like, 'I know we've done some things in unusual ways, but we've figured it out since then! Please don't mock us too much.'

PLAY: Everyone begins somewhere. Speaking of which, you'd been part of the industry for a while before Ghost Town Games. How did working on other projects inform the creation of Overcooked!?
PD: So, I worked at Frontier [Developments] for I think about eight or nine years before we started Ghost Town. [...] We just worked on such a vast array of games. [...] Frontier was kind of finding its feet and figuring out what it wanted to do. So we worked on platform games, we've worked on Kinect games, we did some stuff with HoloLens, we did mobile games. So I think really the main lesson was figuring out the kind of games we wanted to make, I think, because we got a taste for where our skills lay and what we thought was missing, I guess, in the market. [...] When you work on so many different games, you kind of get a taste for

PUNNING FOR GLORY

We asked Ghost Town Games what goes into crafting an absolute groaner of a pun

Gemma Langford: [Laughs] I know people have said they hated me for coming up with 'The Unbread.' Do you know what? If you can believe it there's actually a lot of craft behind a really bad pun! Basically I'll sit there for like, you know, half an hour with a thesaurus with some beautiful word and go, 'What rhymes or what sounds like this beautiful word that I've got?' [...] I'm sitting there and going 'Momentous meat, meaty, mighty meaty?'

Phil Duncan: I hear you muttering to yourself a lot. [Laughs]

GL: For 'Unbread' I would've been sat there going like, 'Evil bread. Evil Bread? No, not Evil Bread, can't do that... Gotta get around those trademarks!' [All laugh]

1 In addition to developing online game modes, Team 17 helped to refine and create concept art. 2 It's a party and everyone's invited. Overcooked! celebrates its fifth birthday with a free update for All You Can Eat, introducing five new levels. 3 Playtesting helped to heighten the chaos. The pirate ship only got its shifting layout after the devs observed player behaviour.

what's out there, and what's doing well and what people like.

And then also when we worked at Frontier, we used to meet up every lunchtime and play local multiplayer games together. So that was why we made Overcooked! in a lot of ways, just because we were making a game that we didn't think existed and we wanted to exist, and we wish we could have had when we were working there.

PLAY: What do you think is so essential to the Overcooked! series' enduring charm?
PD: I feel people are more animated playing a co-op game than they would be if it was competitive somehow. Definitely, communication is one of the keywords that we always use [...] It's really important to us that players are talking, they're not just sat in silence going through the motions. Something we hit on in the first Overcooked! with the pirate ship level, [...] we were finding when we were playtesting [that] people would sit down, and they would get into their role – so one person would be chopping, one person would be getting the veg, and they just stayed in those positions. [...] When we added this slant, that the levels could change, it meant you couldn't sit and do the same thing and suddenly you had to communicate. You have to tell players like 'Oh, I've left a half chopped onion over there – can you finish it? Oh! That's gonna burn!'

I suspect that's one of the things that makes Overcooked! unique and one of the things that has people coming back to it is the fact that they are forced to communicate and they're forced to kind of talk and have these animated discussions.

PLAY: 'Animated' is the word for it. Coming back to how unpredictable some levels can be, where did the idea of a chaotic co-op cooking game come from in the first place?
PD: Cooking is the best analogy for the kind of experience we wanted. We wanted something where people are playing together, where one person can't be like the hero and carry the whole team – it really is dependant on everyone playing. Again, communication, we wanted that to be important. [...] Also, it's universal, right? There's something about the fact that everyone kind of knows how a burger is made. If they've never made one themselves, they kind of know how a pizza is made. So that means that we don't have to teach people too much [...] And means that players can really just focus on the chaos rather than getting bogged down with the minutiae of recipes.

PLAY: What helped to shape the series' often chaotic, slapstick tone?
PD: Lack of sleep, I think, was probably originally what sort of shaped that. [...] And also we didn't want people to think that this was going to be just a sort of everyday cooking game or that it was going to be a game that was like – I dunno – Cooking Mama, where you're focussed on, say, the minutiae of putting together a meal. We wanted something that sort of spoke to the chaos a little bit. But I have no idea why that led us to be like 'Okay, well, there should obviously be a talking onion and it should start on a skyscraper' [...] That, I can only put down to lack of sleep.

As the series has gone on Gemma [Langford] has joined us and does all the writing and all the stories for Overcooked! 2 and for All You Can Eat and she's really sort of tied together the world. I think it's a much rounder and nicer place to be, but it still has a lot of that kind of crazy oddball comedy that she just writes so well. ■

PLAY NOW

Wet

The neo-noir slasher is sharper than you remember

1 You can split your shots when sliding and jumping to target two enemies at once. 2 Rubi rides the rooftops of cars as she chases down her target. 3 Falling to her death, Rubi still takes out her enemies.

Voiced by Buffy The Vampire Slayer's Eliza Dushku[1], heroine Rubi Malone plays like the tattooed rockabilly cousin of Lara Croft. She's gutsy, snarky, and can backflip across a bustling motorway as if hacking The Matrix directly into her veins.

Rubi's a gun for hire, a problem-solver who doesn't mind straying to the dark side if the price is right. Wet's plot takes in San Francisco, Hong Kong, and London, as well as a Texas base camp where you practice Rubi's gymnastic moves. She can knee-slide under obstacles, flip across gaps, swing from poles, and wall-run over enemies – and all these moves flow together while she's shooting enemies with twin guns and slashing at them with her samurai blade. Leaning into an old-school arcade sensibility Wet's not simply about defeating enemies but doing so in style.

Each violent arena is a playground of death. Score multiplier icons float in the world and collecting these boosts your score. Along with linking kills this helps regenerate Rubi's health. It creates a simple loop of killing to survive to chase high scores and unlock new weapons.

RUBI ROCKS

How much you enjoy Wet comes down to how far you buy into the game's style. Its blend of arcade combos and violent grindhouse design is an enticing one. Backed by a rollicking soundtrack[2] that included new songs from Gypsy Pistoleros, Wet sells its Tarantino-does-Tomb-Raider style perfectly.

Yes, it's a style that masks some technical shortcomings, though it can't always hide the fact there's little original happening on screen, no matter how busy it can get. Rubi herself inspires the same love/hate reaction as her biggest inspirations; like Tarantino's characters she is either hailed as a strong star delivering sharp one-liners or condemned as an unlikable lead who wallows in death. Still, similar could be said of Nate Drake. Right?

INFO

PUB Besthesda Softworks
DEV A2M
RELEASED 2009 (PS3)

FOOTNOTES 1 Other Hollywood stars involved include Malcolm McDowell and Alan Cumming. 2 Beck keyboardist Brian LeBarton composed the soundtrack.

HAVE YOUR SAY

Readers tell us what they think of our choice

"I PLAYED IT BECAUSE ELIZA DUSHKU VOICED THE LEAD. IT WAS OKAY. A GOOD FOUNDATION."
Matthew O'Hare

"BEST THING ABOUT THIS GAME IS THE MUSIC. SONETIMES I'LL LOAD IT UP JUST TO LISTEN TO SOME TRACKS."
Justin Reynolds

"THE FIGHT THROUGH THE FALLING BURNING PLANE WRECKAGE IS AWESOME. THE LAST BATTLE WAS... DISAPPOINTING."
Corey Rehberg

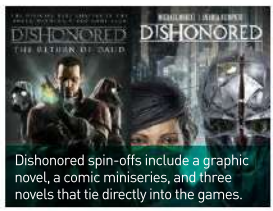
▷ Deathloop has got us hooked on Arkane – was **Prey** an overlooked gem?

A BRIEF HISTORY OF

Arkane Studios

We're not Lyon about the French developer

Arkane's first game was the PC ARPG Arx Fatalis, released in 2002. As in later games, there's a stealth system.



Dishonored spin-offs include a graphic novel, a comic miniseries, and three novels that tie directly into the games.

Arkane's Prey of 2017 isn't connected to the 2006 title; it's actually a spiritual successor to PC's System Shock.

Arkane Studios was founded by 11 people back in 1999. One of the founders, Raphaël Colantonio, previously worked on System Shock. **Dishonored was originally going to be set in feudal Japan and 17th-century London.**

PREY FOR US

Now you know your DLC

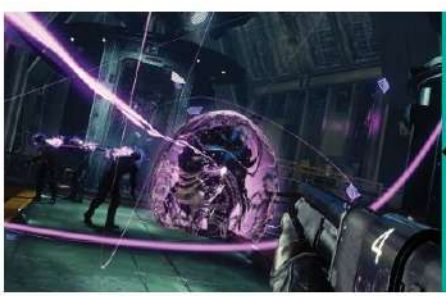
Usually expansions are more of the same, but that wasn't enough for Arkane when it came to Prey. Typhoon Hunter features a multiplayer mode, and Mooncrash essentially introduces a new genre, specifically roguelike. By using randomised elements and unlockable character upgrades, it's a unique mode that manages to feel familiar yet fresh each time.

Dishonored 2's city, Karnaca, was influenced by 19th-century European cities.

Like to murder with pals? There's a Dishonored TTRPG.

Remember 2008's Call Of Duty: World At War? Arkane helped develop some of the maps for the (superb) multiplayer mode.

One Death Of The Outsider writer, Hazel Monforton, was hired thanks to her intelligent, detailed Twitter thread discussing the Outsider.

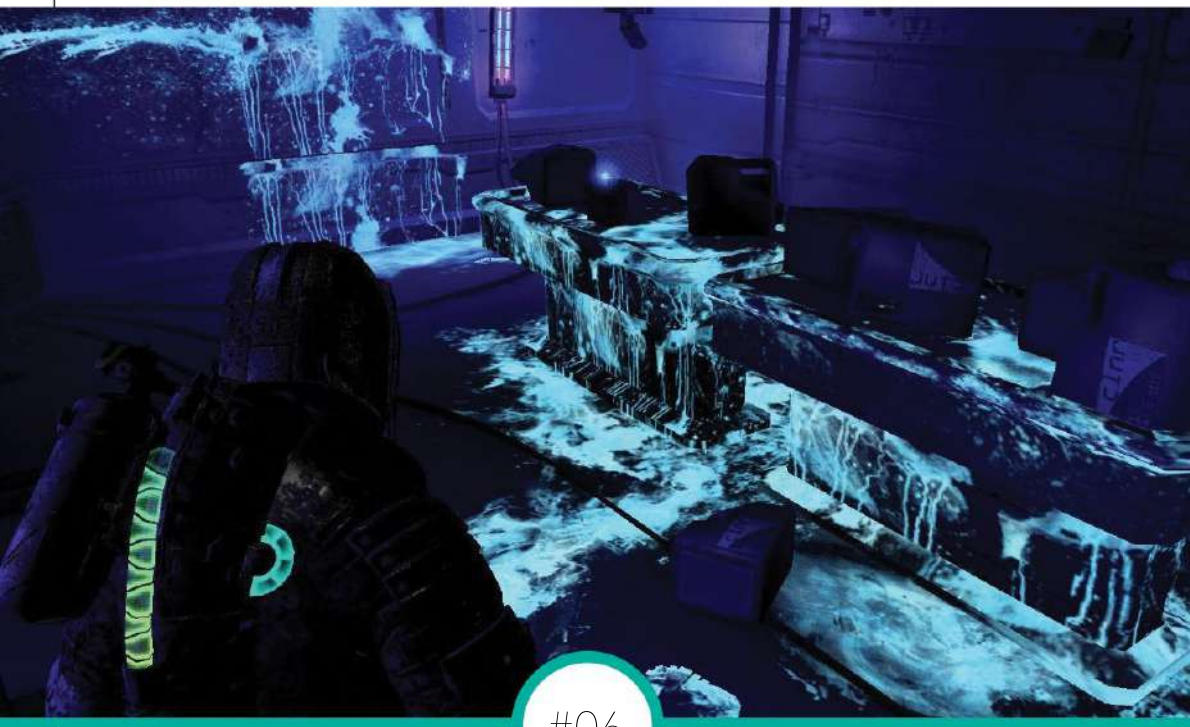


LMNO DOA

No happy ending with Spielberg

In 2005, EA announced it was working on a game with Steven Spielberg, codenamed LMNO, in which the player helped an alien-looking character named Eve. Arkane was brought in to help with level design; things sounded a little Mirror's Edge, with first-person parkour and no gunplay. The project was cancelled in 2010.

▷ Next issue: we immerse ourselves in **horror game** history



#06

Back on the Ishimura

Dead Space 2 makes you relive the horror of the first game in service of its own scares

FORMAT PS3 / **PUB** ELECTRONIC ARTS / **DEV** VISCERAL / **RELEASED** 2011

Three years have passed since Isaac Clarke escaped the USG Ishimura with his sanity (just about) intact. Burdened with the knowledge of the necromorph threat, and haunted by his failure to save those he loved, Clarke attempts to continue his life aboard the Sprawl, a space station orbiting Titan.

But outside the window, pregnant with threat, floats the Ishimura. From early on, you could have looked out of the window and seen the industrial steel of the ship parked in orbit. Silent. Deadly. You, in control of an Isaac Clarke who has clearly been broken by his experiences on the ship, keep catching glimpses of it. "They're not going to make me go back there, are they?" you think.

Enter Chapter 10. There's no avoiding it, you need to go back to the Ishimura to get some tools. You're an engineer, after all. This dreadnought of trauma is beckoning. Once you enter, you see someone's been taking care of her – there's hazard tape, warning signs, and so on. You enter the ship. It's fine. You descend into its bowels. It's fine. You locate your objective. It's... fine?

By this point, you're on edge – jumping at shadows, finger twitching on the trigger. Something is going to happen, and when it does, it's going to *ruin* you. Visceral wouldn't just let you suffer like this for fun, would it? There's got to be *something* waiting for you in the Ishimura, hasn't there? This existential terror couldn't all have just been in your head... could it?

And then the lights go out. ■

TIME TO PLAY? With 12 chapters in the game, you're most of the way through by the time Clarke accepts that his only way to get closer to the Marker – the source of his woes – is to board the Ishimura and recover some gravity tethers.

NEXT MONTH

ON SALE 19 OCTOBER

CALL OF DUTY: VANGUARD

Back to the fronts – Eastern, Western, and beyond

PLAY

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